

# *Irish Writing*

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CONTEMPORARY IRISH LITERATURE

Edited by

**DAVID MARCUS**

and

**TERENCE SMITH**

NUMBER TEN

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## ERIC CROSS

### SAINT BAKEOVEN

I DON'T pretend to be musical, apart, of course, from knowing a good tune when I hear it—the sort of thing that a fellow can whistle in his bath. It does so happen however, that I was almost responsible for what might have been one of the musical sensations of the century, and, before I forget it, I'd better make some record of it for future generations.

I used to spend a part of each year fishing in Kerry in those days. On one occasion, while I was returning from a mountain lake, I ran into a terrific thunderstorm. Below me in the valley I spotted an isolated farmhouse and I worked my way down to it as quickly as possible. I had barely knocked at the door when it was opened by an old man who ushered me in as though I were the prodigal son returning home. He helped me off with my coat, drew up a chair to the fire for me, and, in general, treated me with even more eager hospitality than you usually meet in Kerry.

"You must find it a bit lonely tucked away back here," I suggested, once the preambles of hospitality were settled.

"Yerra—lonely, is it?" replied the old man, whose name, by the way, was Johnny Quill. "The divil a bit lonely am I ever," he went on. "To tell God's truth, 'tis just the other way about."

"How come?" I quite naturally asked, considering the situation of the place.

"'Tis the fairies," he replied, in a matter of fact way. "Them devils do be at me, pestering and worrying and annoying and bothering me all hours of the day and night. 'Tis only when a Christian, such as yourself, comes along that the sight of him drives them out and I have a bit of peace and ease for myself as it is now. But the moment you'll be gone them devils will be back again with their whispering and their rustling like mice round a corn bin. They have me patience worn out. There should be a law passed against them by those useless people up in Dublin and then put the police onto them. But, oh, no—they're much too busy passing laws to make hens lay eggs by act of Parliament to have the time to do anything useful. I tell you that the fairies are the plaguiest, most pestering and bewildering form of creation that man was ever burdened with."

"Yes," I agreed, for, after all, an old man's fancies break no bones. "I am sure that you must find them a bit of a nuisance".

"Nuisance! Nuisance!" bellowed Johnny. "Why, the devils have me near driven mad. I lambaste them with the handle of a broom. I give them a histe of my boot and a skelp of my tongue, but it's all a waste of energy. A few minutes later and they will



be back at their old comether again: whispering hocus pocus; mis-laying things and upsetting things on me. There's all classes of them," he continued, "but there is one of them—the plaguiest one of me whole pick of devils, who comes mainly by night. A sort of a foreigner I'd say he would be and a damned bad-tempered one at that. There's some of them all mischief but with this one the game is all music. Whenever he puts his face inside the kitchen the whole house does be filled with the sound of music as though it was the air of the place. Then he tries to be telling me something but I can't make head or tail of the queer language he speaks and that only seems to make him madder and he shakes the great head of him and holds the great fists of him in the air, with the fingers spread out like a dealer trying to buy a beast in a fair for ten pounds from a slow witted man."

"Saint! Saint! Saint!" he yells. Then "Bakeoven! Bakeoven! Bakeoven!" and I can't make sense of that at all for the devil a bit does he look like a saint and the devil a bit do I know what he means by his "Bakeoven" unless it be one of these newfangled fakes that they have in the towns for the lazy women to bake in."

"To hell with you and your 'bakeoven'," I yell at him, "if it's a 'bakeoven' that you are trying to sell me or persuade me to buy. It was on the cake from the bastable pot that I was reared and on the same I'll finish my days. Then the music starts all over again till my head is like a hive of bees ready to swarm with the sound of it."

"All very interesting," I agreed. "It looks as though the worst of the storm is over. I think that I'll be pushing on." I said goodbye to Johnny and thanked him, and, as far as I was concerned, that would have been the end of the business, for fairies aren't particularly in my line.

It so happened however, that there was a professor of music johnny, from Oxford, staying in the hotel, collecting 'folk music', whatever that may be. Naturally he was a difficult subject for conversation and that night I happened to mention the rigmarole Johnny had told me that day, by way of being sociable.

The professor johnny, whose name was Peterson, pricked up his ears almost immediately and showed more signs of life than I had seen so far in him when I told him the yarn. I went away to bed and naturally had forgotten all about it by the following morning but it seemed that this fellow Peterson had, overnight, made a mountain of the story. He had worked out some crazy notion from it about a German composer called Beethoven, who had composed nine symphonies and died before he had finished his tenth; and he had come back in ghost form to worry poor old Johnny Quill about it.

Peterson had worked out that Johnny's 'Saint' was the German for 'tenth' and his 'Bakeoven' was really 'Beethoven'—the composer's name, and the music Johnny heard, was, of course, the music of the tenth symphony, now finished. It didn't seem to be dripping with sense to me.

I happened to go into the bar before lunch for an appetiser

and who should be there but Johnny Quill himself, celebrating a deal in sheep. We had a drink together and I left him to it and went off in search of food. But in the dining room I ran into Peterson, bubbling over with some new brainwave on Johnny's story. In the hope of finishing the matter off, as far as I was concerned, I led him out and introduced him to Johnny himself, the fount of inspiration. But it wasn't my lucky day, for in spite of his knowledge of music he could not make anything of Johnny's accent, no more than Johnny could make of his, so I had to stand in as interpreter.

I opened the ball with the first round of drinks, Peterson having lemonade and going straight into action, instructing me to ask Johnny to describe the appearance of the ghost or fairy or whatever it was, in detail.

"Tell him," said Johnny, "that he is a stout block of a bucko with a great stook of hair on his head as though he is in dispute with the barber—and that might well be, for he has a fierce, bad tempered jowl on him. His clothes? . . . Yerra, he does mostly wear some sort of an ould swally tail coat with an ould choker round his neck and the knee breeches they used to wear in the time of the caroline hats."

"Hm!" snorted Peterson, like the man who had found the piece of kidney in the pie, when I translated this for him. "Ask him now what language his fairy or whatever it is speaks."

"The divil be from me but how would I know that," replied Johnny. "Tell the man of the lemonade that 'tis neither English nor Irish but some gibberish makeup of his own and that the only words that I can make out at all are his 'Saint' and his 'Bakeoven', and to hell with him and his 'bakeovens'. I'll stick to me bastable pot."

Peterson was studying Johnny intently as he put him through the third degree. "Ask him now," ordered Peterson, "if anyone else sees this apparition or hears the music."

"Only the divil himself could answer that," snorted Johnny, "but 'tis not likely for ould Bakeoven wouldn't have the time left to be annoying anyone else after all the time that he spends annoying me. He'd scarcely have the time left to wash himself . . . and will you add to that," Johnny continued, "that I will answer no more questions till the gentleman puts away the lemonade and has a glass of whiskey with me like a Christian."

Peterson, in spite of protests, had to yield. Johnny, as the oracle, could call the tune and he called it quickly.

"Would it be possible for me to hear the music and see this ghost if I went along to the house?" was Peterson's next query.

"It might and it might not," was Johnny's answer to this. "But mostly I'd be saying against it for I do notice that when anyone comes into the house to me the music stops and ould Bakeoven goes up the chimney or out of the window. But tell the gentleman that he's welcome anytime and if he can salt the ould divil and take him away with him to foreign parts there will be no man was ever so welcome."



The party spirit was getting into its stride by now. Peterson disappeared for a few minutes and I was hoping that we could adjourn *sine die* but it wasn't to be. He had only been up to his room and he returned with an illustrated history of music. He instructed me to hand it to Johnny and to tell him to look through it and to see if there was a picture in it at all like his 'fairy'.

Johnny licked his thumb and started to turn the pages one by one. I did not translate all his remarks and comments on the pictures of famous composers he saw, though they were amusing. I had doubts if this Peterson fellow had any sense of humour at all.

After thumbing about half way through the book Johnny let out a yell, putting his finger down on a picture of Beethoven.

"The pesky ould divil himself," he whooped. "The living split image of him! Saint Bakeoven and the great ugly puss of him!" At this Peterson went up in the air. He ordered another round of drinks immediately. Even I began to wonder if there might be something in it after all.

"Ask him now," said Peterson, as pleased as Punch, "if he could describe or remember the music he hears."

"Could I remember the music!" exclaimed Johnny. "Indeed, but it would be the day of the greatest aise to me when the day dawns that I disremember every screech of it. As for describing of it," he continued, after some head-scratching, "will you tell him that it would be beyond the powers of the worst poet yet born to put words to it. 'Tis such a roaring and a buzzing and a banging and a beating: such a twirling of trumpets and a tweaking of flutes and a scattering of the scraping of fiddles that the like of it was never heard before in the history of the world. 'Tis like the bellowings of dumb animals in pain and the howling of infants in divilment and the scolding of women in crossness and in the midst of it all there is this ould divil of a queer one, waving his hands up and down and about in the air as though the sound was all running out of the ends of his fingers like porter out of a tap."

"Only once did I hear the match of it in my life and that was in the days of the ould militia in the town of Kenmare when someone had treated the band with decency and the band had treated themselves with equal decency and they marched through the town 'stocious' and every man of them doing his best to outblow the other fellow."

Johnny now ordered a round and Peterson replied with another question, asking if Johnny could hum or whistle the music or give some actual idea of it. Johnny was now most ready to oblige.

"I'd give you more than an idee of it, with a heart and a half, and good riddance to it," said he, "but that it is a class of music that has no sense at all to it at all at all. 'Tis what you might call a porridge of a music—not like the 'Blackbird' or 'The Coolin' or 'The Wind that Shakes the Barley' or any of the decent civilised tunes that wake a man's heart and set his feet tapping. But I will do the best I can to accommodate the gentleman for he is



turning out to be a better class of a man than my first judgment of him. 'Tis something like this that it goes."

With that Johnny drained his glass, threw back his head, fixed his eye on a spot on the ceiling and started to screech and to bawl and to roar and to groan until, after a couple of minutes, even Peterson, with all his interest in music, had had enough of Johnny Quill's version of Beethoven's Tenth Symphony. It was a thirst-provoking effort and Peterson thought the game worth while but demanded a *quid* for his *quo*.

"Ask him if there is any musical instrument that he can play with which he might be able to reproduce some of the music he hears."

After probing into the nature of Johnny's polite accomplishments, the only thing that I could discover was that when he was young—and that was a long time ago—he had been able to play the bagpipes—but not very well. About here the party broke up.

The following morning, when Peterson had recovered after a good night's sleep, he had worked out a plan of campaign, for there wasn't any doubt now in his mind, on the circumstantial evidence so far produced. He was on the verge of the most amazing musical discovery of the century. The weather wasn't too good for fishing and as there wasn't much else to do I continued as *aide de camp* and general adviser and interpreter.

The first thing that we did was to visit Johnny's house and we soon found that we were quite definitely not allergic to fairies. Even Peterson did not hear a note. According to Johnny the moment we entered the house both the fairy and his music faded away. Naturally Peterson was a bit hurt about this but he was quite certain that Johnny was speaking the truth and quite incapable of pulling Peterson's leg on his home ground, as you might say.

This meant that we had to fall back on Johnny himself as medium, interpreter or what you will. And that meant that, by hook or crook, he would have to reproduce what he heard by means of the only musical instrument he knew—the bagpipes. Peterson wasn't at all in favour of my suggestion, my quite practical suggestion, of bringing a band along and letting Johnny conduct it. He even suspected that I was pulling his leg and not treating the matter with sufficient gravity.

So the problem, or rather the practical solution to it, was narrowed down to bagpipes. Somewhere in the district there was reputed to be a pair or set or whatever it is of them but when it came to finding them they were as elusive as the end of a rainbow, flitting ahead of us from valley to valley and house to house. At last we caught up with them. Johnny regarded them carefully, seriously and ruefully. With all his native gift of courtesy he could find little good to say about them. There was a whistle or a tweeter or some such vital part missing. One of the protruding flutes or whatever they were was most obviously cracked. More apparent still was a great rent in the windbag. But, with optimism, a dash of glue, some twine and wire, a splash of tar and a bit of an old tyre, Johnny thought that he might be able to make a job of them.

Eventually, with the help of the 'smith and the carpenter and a man who was a great hand at tying a fly and another man who had an uncle in America who, in his day had been a famous piper, so that he had claims to being an expert, one place removed, we got the contraption fixed up. As Johnny tactfully described it—"they worked in a kind of a class of a way." Now all that he needed was a few days' practice to get his wind and fingers into trim.

The appointed night arrived and with it rain in sheets and floods and torrents. This seemed to me to be a warning to let well alone and sleeping spirits lie. It seemed just any other kind of night rather than one to set off into the darkness and the wetness of a desolate mountain valley to hear the first performance of a symphony played on bagpipes—or played any way at all for that matter. Peterson's mind however was made up and I decided that being in for a penny I might as well be in for a pound.

We borrowed the hotel proprietor's car. I took along a bottle of whiskey and a couple of rugs. As luggage Peterson had a wad of music paper. Long before we arrived at the concert hall it was obvious, even above the storm, that Johnny had entered into the spirit of the occasion and was already having a preliminary canter. It seems that somehow the fairy or ghost had got an inkling of what was in the wind and had readily co-operated with the notion. In fact they had already a dress rehearsal and come to a common understanding of the procedure to be adopted. Beethoven would conduct a few bars and while they still lingered in Johnny's ears he would have a skirl or whatever the musical term is for a dash at it and so they would progress from bar to bar.

Johnny himself was by this time so taken up with the idea and the possible hope of ridding himself of his musical lodger, that he was taking the matter almost as seriously as Peterson himself. He wouldn't even have a drink before we started. "Only a dart, now and again, of the purest of spring water," he said, pointing to a bottle at his side, "just for the wind's sake, until the gentleman is satisfied."

Still we were not *personae gratae* with fairies and while we were within the kitchen Johnny said there would not be a note of of music. When you think of all the trouble that Peterson was giving himself and other people it did really seem a bit inconsiderate on the part of Beethoven, but judging by the picture of him it was about what you might be led to expect from him. So it meant that we—or rather Peterson—would have to eavesdrop through the window.

I, never having been much of an enthusiast for symphonies or bagpipes, retired to the shelter of the car. I wrapped myself up in the rugs and opened the bottle of whiskey. Unfortunately I was still within earshot of the bedlam which was let loose when the performance started, but as the storm increased the howling of the wind and the lashing rain toned it down somewhat. There would be a squealing and a screeching from the kitchen as though a score of pigs were being slaughtered. There was Peterson huddled up



against the window ledge, with the rain cascading over him from the roof, while he scribbled down crotchets and quavers. Now and again he would bawl through the window for a repeat. Now and again there would be a lull in the noise, as Johnny took a swig of the purest spring water for his wind's sake.

Mercifully after a short while I fell into a dose. What woke me wasn't a noise. It was the absence of a noise. I came to, conscious that now there was only the howling of the wind and the roar of the swollen mountain torrents around me. There wasn't a sound from Johnny's kitchen. The door was open and Peterson was missing. I made a dash for the house to find Johnny on the flat of his back on the floor, as he would describe it, 'stocious'. The bottle of the 'finest of spring water' lay smashed beside him and from the trickle which was left in it there came a smell which might be mistaken for whiskey. It is not unknown in Kerry where so many improbable things seem to be possible for 'the finest of spring water' to have such a smell. Beside the fragments of the bottle lay the corpse of the bagpipes in a heap.

"Busht! Busht and be damned!" were Johnny's last words as he gave himself up to the soundest sleep that ever fell on any man. The description aptly covered all—Johnny, the bottle and the bagpipes. We made Johnny comfortable for the night in his bed. There was nothing more that we could do. The performance was ended. The carriage awaited at the door.

Peterson was quite happy but very wet. There wasn't a doubt now in his mind. It was the true, authentic Beethoven music alright, recognisable even through the medium of bagpipes. A few score nights such as this and he would have the whole thing down in crotchets and quavers. A few months of work on it and it would be ready to astonish the world.

It seemed unfortunate that Peterson developed a high temperature during the night and had to be rushed off to a nursing home the following morning with pneumonia. But all's well that ends well and a few days later Johnny himself had to be taken to the county hospital. The combination of the finest of spring water, the excitement and the strenuous exercises of bagpipe blowing had not been the best treatment for the heart at his age. So, as it turned out, Peterson would not have been able to do anything more, and anyway the bagpipes were quite beyond any further repair.

I had quite a busy time between the two invalids: writing letters for Peterson, when he turned the corner, and doing a few odd things for Johnny. The doctor had advised Johnny to stay on in the hospital and he wasn't at all unwilling. I arranged the settling of his bit of land to a relative so that Johnny would be able to draw the old age pension and so have no further worry.

As soon as Peterson was well enough I drove him over to see Johnny and, needless to say, Peterson had only one interest in the visit.

"Ould Bakeoven and his music? . . . Yerra, thank God that I have neither sight nor sound of him since the blessed day that

## IRISH WRITING

I came in here—and good riddance, for at last after all these years I have peace and ease for myself and am able to call my soul my own.”

“But, manalive!” almost shrieked Peterson, “don’t you remember the music?”

“The divil a note of it,” answered Johnny, puffing contentedly away at his pipe. “The divil a note of it have I heard since I came in and the divil a note of it will I hear to the end of my days for I have handed the place and the cow and the sheep to a nephew of mine and I have no mind to budge from here till they carry me out feet foremost. I’ll live the rest of my life like a fine civil servant, at the country’s expense, taking my aise like a lord, instead of being at the beck and call of a pack of fairies like a boots in an hotel.”

Peterson cajoled, bribed, bullied, pleaded, wheedled and argued but Johnny would listen to no argument and no persuasion. The last thing that he said to Peterson when we came to say goodbye was: “If you should happen to see Ould Bakeoven at any time during your travels will you tell him from me that I did him a great harm and a great injustice and that I am sorry for it, for after all he was right. ’Tis the new-fangled ‘bakeovens’ that they use in this place for their breadmaking and you never in all your life tasted sweeter or grander or nuttier bread.”



## MICHAEL CAMPBELL

### BACK

(Michael Campbell's first story, 'Country Folk,' written under the pseudonym 'Peter Hill,' appeared in *IRISH WRITING* No 8).

AS the train pulled in to the little station Tom Mulvey stepped anxiously down on to the platform, and there was his father, much older after three years, and somehow frail and pathetic.

They carried Tom's two bags out to the car, the old Ford. The car brought everything back as if he had never been away. He felt captured, and was silent. Father had chosen to drive. For a time he talked about the journey, about Mother, about home, about everything save the subject on both their minds. Tom was silent. It had not occurred to him that his father would smell of whiskey, would talk in a rambling fashion, would seem, unlike the car, the station, all the inanimate things, a stranger. Mr. Mulvey, meeting with no response, stopped talking. He thought about Harrison. He wondered if Tom and he would get on. Harrison worried him. He was a young man who had come to the office with the keenest interest in Law. Now he was a successful owner of greyhounds. Worse, Mulvey suspected that he drank . . . So with their thoughts they drove away from the town, past high walls and trees, all familiar to Tom, all now back, for ever.

The wooden gates were open, "Rockfield" on both of them. They turned up the short drive to the circle of gravel in front of the house. Mrs. Mulvey was standing in the doorway, small, in a tweed suit, calmly smiling, her hands folded. Tom remembered how when she smiled it was always an effort, so that she blushed. But that was when she was amused; this was different—a smile of welcome. Tom kissed her on the cheek. She blushed.

"It's lovely to be back," he said. He turned to look at the tennis-court, the high trees and wall beyond, the garden-roller, the starlings rushing about on the grass. It was a grey August afternoon.

"Come in," said his mother.

They went in through the hall, in to the drawing-room, to the worn arm-chairs, the clock on the mantelpiece, the old magazines, mother's knitting, the family photographs on the piano. One addition Tom noticed with a shock—his own photograph, taken in London.

Mulvey followed.

"Well, here we are," he said. "How does it feel to be home?"

Tom did not know how it felt.

"Wonderful," he replied. "I think I'll go up to my room and have a wash."

He brought the cases up the narrow stairs, noting, remembering the smell. The wood creaked. In his room he went to the window and looked out at the back yard and at the bright green fields beyond. The new silence was oppressive, only the sound of a tractor in the distance. His school photographs were on the wall, and his books, Percy F. Westerman, the "William" books, the "Biggles" books. In cold water from the hot tap he washed away the dirt of the journey. He went across the landing to the lavatory. It was varnished wood, walls and seat, the paper in a box with 'Golden Miller' on it. Everything creaked. Everything smelled of the wooden smell. He went downstairs.

His father was in the hall, wearing a battered hat, carrying a stick, and in gum-boots.

"Like to look around?" he asked.

"Yes, I'd love to."

"Got your boots?"

"No, but I'm all right."

They looked at Tom's shoes, brown, polished, thin. His father said, "Come along then. This way's the best." And he tucked the stick under his arm and went through the back of the hall, down some steps into the kitchen. It was hot there: two rosy-faced girls were putting something into the oven. They stood up and looked shy.

"This is master Thomas," said Mulvey, "Betty and Norah."

They nodded 'how do you do's', and to Mulvey's quick "Come along" he and Tom stepped out into the yard.

It had been raining; there were puddles among the cobblestones. Tom avoided them. Old Morrison came out of a shed with the labrador, Ranger, beside him. He touched his cap and said, "It's good to see you back, Masther Tom," and he and Mulvey discussed Nancy, the mare, who was slightly lame, while Ranger jumped on Tom, up and down, up and down.

They left Morrison, and the dog came with them out into the vegetable garden. Everything dripped water. Tom stepped on to the wet mud for some raspberries. His father talked about what had done well this year and what had not done well.

It was teatime. The radio played teatime music. Tom remembered that music was turned on throughout most of the day—"Light" music, never classical and never by any means what was called "Jazz". Mother poured. Father, in a corner of the room, gave himself a stiff whiskey. She forced herself not to notice. Tom watched him; his eyes had become bleary, his cheeks mottled. Only he had changed.

"Well," said Mrs. Mulvey, "have you seen everything?"

"Yes, everything," Tom replied, realising after he had said it how true it was. The clock on the mantelpiece said "four-thirty". Tom looking up, thought—"That clock doesn't know how many hours and days are ahead of it!"

"Nancy seems quite sprightly now," said Mulvey, shamelessly returning, glass in hand, to sit with them.



Mother remembered that Tom took only one lump and only a drop of milk.

"Good," she said. "Perhaps she may go to the point-to-point."

"We'll," said he, "we'll just have to wait and see. . . ."

The talk continued about nothings. Clearly they had decided not to speak of Tom's return, his retreat. He wished they would.

After tea Mulvey said, surprisingly, "I think I'll go upstairs and have a rest. You don't mind, Tom my boy, do you?"

"No, father, of course not."

He took his whiskey and went, frail, slow on his feet.

"Your father's not been too well lately, you know," said mother. "It's a godsend you decided to come back."

"Yes," he said. He was shocked. The clock moved on. The room had grown darker as grey skies gathered outside. Silence came between them. The years assembled in the room, past years and future years. "Tea for two," said the radio, "and two for tea." But Tom had no appetite for the home-made bread and butter and the home-made scones.

He heard himself proposing an idea, unconsidered, rash.

"Mother, would you mind very much if I took the car into town and had a look at the old place?"

She did mind. He wished he had not spoken.

"No, Tom," she said. "I suppose not. You'll be home to supper though?"

"Oh yes, of course, only just a look. Where would I find the keys of the office, I wonder?"

"Better ask your father, Tom."

Father was asleep on his bed, on the table beside him his drink and a bunch of keys. Tom took the keys. In a few moments he was away. The old Ford was good to feel, like an old friend; and to be alone again was bliss. Soon he was in town.

He drove slowly up the street. It was straight and extremely wide, as if the houses had merely gathered on either side of the main road to watch the cars go by. This—and there seemed to be no other explanation of the town—gave a subconscious sense of futility to the newcomer, even to Tom. There were only a few pub-loungers to be seen. He hoped that they would not recognise him, but he was sure that they would deduce everything from the Mulvey car, besides his proud father had probably spread the news. So, resigned to exposure, he stopped outside the ground-floor, frosted-glass window on which was written: "Charles Mulvey, Solicitor, Commissioner for Oaths."

He stepped into the dark hall, remembering it at once—the slippery linoleum, the hat stand, the stuffed salmon. In the office two desks faced each other, upon each a mass of papers. Round the walls were tin boxes in which were more papers and beside them were rows of ancient Law Books and guides to the Turf. The room smelled of the pipesmoke that had collected for sixty years, and the window had developed round its edges a seal of white cobwebs. Three generations had worked here. Two were on the walls: Thomas, the first, stood smiling in riding-jacket and

velvet cap, the hunt rampaging behind him; Henry, the second, was stern, in a black frock coat, holding his hat to his chest. They looked at Tom; with little confidence. He glanced again at the larger desk, turned and went out.

Tom left the car and walked down the street. In the grey evening light the houses were melancholy. He passed dark, uninviting pubs interspersed with shops that displayed buckets, boots, saddles, second-hand clothes, tobacco and haberdashery. The names—O'Brien, Doherty, Murphy, Sleator, he could have recited in correct order without a glance. He passed the Town Hall, grey and peeling, with a stone porch and pillars and a stopped clock. On one pillar was a torn tiger—Duffy's Circus, last year; on the other a rain-washed poster—"Vote No. 1 Fallon," referring to an election of three months ago. He passed the Casino, with its white front that had turned to grey; it was showing "The Courtneys of Curzon Street." Tom stopped. There was no sound in the street save the sound of men's voices in the doorways, and now and then a laugh. A heavy lorry came roaring through without slackening speed, its wheels making a sticky noise on the wet road. Its roar died away, leaving silence again. Tom crossed the road to Hennessy's.

Hennessy's was the town's best hotel—that is the better of the two. Its bar was the town's chief rendez-vous. The bar, apart from the counter itself, contained tables and chairs, an empty fireplace and yellow wallpaper with a flowered edge at eye-level. It was deserted. Tom rapped timidly on the counter and Joe Quinn, who was a big, bald philosopher, came through from the inner room. He recognised Tom.

"Well, well, well. So you're back," he said.

"That's right," Tom replied, shaking hands.

"You old man was telling us. It's a shame."

"A shame?"

"Yes. Wait now you must have a little something with me."

Joe turned his back to pour two whiskeys.

"Why is it a shame?" Tom repeated.

"Well, I mean to say there's nobody stays here. . . . Here's luck! . . . What is it brings you back at all?"

"Someone has to carry on the business," Tom said. This was not his reason. Joe's attitude had sealed his impressions of the past hours and in this abominable room he felt ill; the whiskey tasted vile.

"Where is everybody?" he asked.

"Well," Joe paused, "you know all the young people are gone from here long ago. . . ."

"I know. But where are the others?"

"At the Dogs, I daresay."

"The Dogs?"

"Yes, they race them in O'Brien's field. Every Saturday."

"Oh, it's Saturday, is it?"

"That's right. Should be a good crowd in any time now."

Two commercials came in, one silent and small, with a toupé,



the other large with enormous spectacles and eyes that looked for an audience. Joe introduced them as Price and Byrne.

"Young Mulvey is it?" said Byrne, "I know your father well, what'll yeh have?"

Whiskeys were ordered without time for their decision.

"And for yourself, Mr. Byrne?"

"I'll take a glass o' wather, thank yeh, Joe."

"Is that the way yeh are?" asked Price.

"My God, yes! I took a bloody clatther last night."

"Yeh look pretty shook."

"Janey, I've been workin' all the week. . . . No dhrink Monday, Chewsdays, Wensdays, and last night all of a sudden this bloody clatther. Thanks, Joe."

They drank.

"Well, Mr. Mulvey," said Byrne, "I suppose it's for a holiday you're back?"

"No," said Tom. "I'm back for keeps."

"My God!" exclaimed Byrne, "well, the Lord help you!" He grinned at the others. "It's no joke. We fellahs move around a bit, but sure it's all the same."

At once they began to share news and memories of other travellers. Tom ordered another round; Byrne intimated that he would give up water for a while. Tom half-listened. This was not yet reality. They spoke of someone called "the Major". Byrne described him as "the greatest bloody practical joker ever lived."

"D'yeh remember the time he took out the lads from Sunlight Soap? . . . They thought they were gettin' more booze. So he puts them in a taxi and sends them off to the Old Men's Home at Kilmainham."

Price laughed a wheezy laugh and began to tell his own tales which were drowned by the entry of a large group of men in the highest of spirits. Tom stood apart. A man came up to him whom he recognised as Doherty, owner of the town's Big Store, and with him Farrell, from the Bank. It was impossible to hear what they were saying. Farrell went to get drinks, pushing into the crowd at the counter. The commercials moved aside, deep in reminiscence. Doherty was shouting above the din.

"Didn't expect you in to-day, my boy. Nothing wrong?"

"No," shouted Tom, "I wanted to have a look around."

"Well, we're very glad to have you back. It'll be four of us for lunch now, eh? The Old Man hasn't been able to eat for the past week. You know he's not been . . ."

Doherty was not permitted to finish. A tall youth came over, swaying with glass in hand, struck Tom on the shoulder and said, "Well, well. So this is young Mulvey!"

Tom saw an expression of loathing come upon Doherty. Then he was alone with the stranger. This was a pale-faced youth with sleek hair. He wore a blue suit with fountain pens in the top pocket and non-descript collar and tie; this was negated by a canary-yellow pullover and—which Tom could not see—pointed shoes full of fancy holes.

"I've been waiting to have a look at you." The youth held Tom back a little. "You don't look a bad sort."

"Thank you," said Tom seriously. Like the stranger he was tight.

"Know who I am?" asked the yellow pullover.

"No, I'm afraid not."

"I'm Harrison."

"Oh"

"Here, I'll get you a drink," said Harrison. But before he could move Farrell, from the Bank, stepped over, thrust a whiskey into Tom's hand, and stepped away again.

"Tha's right," said Harrison, looking at it, "you drink whiskey, I drink porter. You're the boss, the bloody boss, like your . . . Jesus he doesn't know who I am! Well listen an' I'll tell you." Harrison bent over, talked low. "I'm the bloody fool that sits at the other desk."

"Good God!" said Tom.

"Good God, sez he. I like that. I like you." Harrison pondered. "You know something?" he said. "I'd keep away from those fellahs if I were you . . ."

"Who?"

"Doherty, Farrell, an' all that crew. You stick to me an' mine."

Tom threw back his whiskey.

"I'll get you another," said Harrison. "I like you." He took the glass and pushed into the mob.

Immediately Doherty and Farrell were back. They were glum.

"Well?" said Doherty, attempting a smile. "How do you like the old J. J.? Bit of a change from the other side, eh?"

"Yes," said Tom, "a change. Yes, a change." He gripped the back of a chair behind him.

"You know," said Doherty, "we thought we'd warn you. . . . We'd keep away from their sort if we were you." He nodded towards the bar.

'Wewereyou' Tom said to himself, 'Wewereyou.'

"The Old Man's been too kind," said Farrell. "You'll know what to do."

"Yes, oh yes," replied Tom.

Harrison was back with a drink.

"Let's sit down," said Tom.

Two hours later they were still sitting down. Harrison's friends were around them. Harrison's dog had won the big race and Harrison a lot of money. At the bar the two commercials sat alone. Doherty and Farrell had gone long ago.

A nameless friend of Harrison's, his chair tipped back, and his hands in his pockets, was singing,

"Come back to Erin, Mavourneen, Mavourneen . . ."

Tom had tears in his eyes.

Harrison's friend had sung many songs. This was the last. They had promised it. Joe had turned out all the lights save that over the counter. Now as the song ended, something, perhaps the

song, recalled Tom to his situation. Suddenly horror-struck at the discovery, he rose, wiping the tears from his eyes, and stumbled to the bar. Joe had gone into the inner room. He stood by the commercials.

"Are yeh swimmin'?" he heard Byrne say.

"Oh yes," from Price.

"They say it's good swimmin' at Carlow."

"Yes."

"What's the swimmin' like at Kilkenny?"

"Good."

"Swimmin's a great game, but you'd want a bit o' sun. The wind'd cut yeh. Did yeh hear about Paddy Hannigan?"

"No."

"He had the bloody bonnet blown off o' the Vauxhall near Ballina, and it went into a bloody bog."

Over Price's wheezy laugh Tom shouted, "Joe!"

Joe was back.

"Telephone, Joe, where's telephone?"

"Upstairs, Mr. Mulvey. But I wouldn't . . ."

Outside in the hall was welcome peace. A deer's head and antlers protruded amidst cartoons by "Spy." The Dining-room faced the Commercial Room. Tom went up the carpeted stairs and on the landing saw the telephone. He waited, thinking of what to say, visualising the other end—Panic, Despair, bitter argument, Father perhaps ill. He lifted the receiver, spoke to the operator, and very quickly heard his mother's anxious "Hello?"

"Hello, Mother, is that you?"

"Tom! ! . . . Tom! What's happened, where are you?"

"I'm all right. I'm in . . ."

"Tom, we've been desperately worried. Where are you, what's happened?"

"I'm in Hennessy's. It's all right. They were welcoming" (difficult word) "me back. I'll be home . . ."

"Tom, I think your father wants to speak to you. Hold on."

Silence at the other end. Much too long. He held the phone with a wet hand. He saw the drawing-room, saw the two of them.

"Hallo. Tom, your father says . . . he won't speak to you. Are you coming home?"

"Yes, Mother, yes. I'm on the way."

"Come quickly Tom, will you?"

"Yes, Mother, I'm coming. I'll be there. Good-bye." He put it down.

Hell, he wasn't going home, not to that! He stepped through an open door on the landing into an empty lounge. He switched on the light to show brown-leather arm-chairs and a piano. The windows overlooked the main street. He leaned out.

It was raining, heavily. It fell straight, and silent, and was already running deep in the gutters. High up the red neon "Casino" dominated the street. The last picturegoers were coming out. They turned up their coat-collars and drifted away, the girls arm in arm, laughing, the men moving into doorways where they lit



their pipes, stamped their feet, and began a murmur of conversation. Someone whistled. It was "Buttons and Bows". Up the street the old Ford was shining wet under a lamppost. Inside, in the office, Thomas and Henry would be awake, wide-eyed. Outside the dark Town Hall the town's telephone booth stood alight and alone. A few shops flaunted electric-light: Tom could see "The Emporium" which was ladies' hats, and directly opposite Hennessy's, the "Beauty Parlour", which showed a lady's head in a red wig, permanently waved. On the window was a poster. Tom could read the larger type. "Dawn Beauty Queen", it said, "will be selected from ladies attending Grand Dance in Mayfair Ballroom." Tom stood at the window a long time, watching the raindrops where they were silvery under the street-lamps.

## BLANAID SALKELD



### *BRIEF SURVEY*

Careless, amid these seasons of collapse,  
It seems now to be anybody's world.  
The palimpsests lie ignorantly furled—  
And winds of death loud stumbling through far gaps,  
Against the tree the withered foliage flaps.  
Beauty away, music and peace, are hurled.  
(Beside a quiet rock, a brown stream purled—  
They are both gone out of the day, perhaps.)  
The sun burns on unharmed beyond eclipse;  
Bright with belief, souls cannot know defeat.  
But these clever ones, swaying towards pleasure—  
Marriageless, without burden—out of measure  
They dance, sing, too busy/tired to retreat—  
While foreign faith is manning battleships.

## BRINSLEY MacNAMARA

### THE WORLD AND GARRETT REILLY

**G**EORGE BARDEN was a marvel for finding natural stories. I never met him that he did not bring me into the very middle of one in progress, as it were. And there was always his sense of form, his feeling for ironic completeness in the character or the situation that he would have made ready for my entertainment.

So, when I went with him into deLacy's one cold February evening, I had a feeling, as we stood waiting for our drinks, that soon there might be more than the drinks to warm us. I was wondering why he had brought me into deLacy's, instead of into the much better-looking pub at the corner of the street, or why, indeed, we had wandered into this unfamiliar quarter of the town at all . . . But George was always fast upon the heels of one's thought.

"I just brought you around this way and in here because of certain happenings in these parts to-night, and because I wanted to show you the lad there."

He inclined his head sideways in the direction of the "curate" who was getting our drinks at some distance down the bar.

"He's a story—or a play—complete in himself; take a good look at him first and then I'll tell you."

I observed the man behind the bar. He was oldish for a "curate", I thought, but this notion of him was immediately belied by the great show of youthfulness and agility with which he was suddenly forced to behave by pressure of circumstances. For, into deLacy's, there was now an unaccountable rush of customers.

"I timed this rather sharply," said George, extricating himself and our drinks from the rush, "they're here for the first interval and it looks as if the thing must be having a good house."

"House?" I said, "but there's no theatre around here?"

"Evidently, you have heard nothing about it, but in a glorified shed at the end of the lane right opposite the door here there's a new Intellectual Drama Group kicking off to-night. Oh, something quite, *quite* new. Their idea is to go back instead of going on, to create a kind of Pre-Michaelite School of Drama. You know the sort of thing they tried to do for painting a hundred years ago in England—the Pre-Raphaelite Movement. Well, roughly, that's the set-up of this venture—something of the same sort now for the Irish theatre. They're going to do plays that were never done in Dublin before—and probably never will again. To-night they're producing *The Far-Away Princess*, and two other one-act plays, by Sudermann."

I looked blankly at George. What *was* the connection between all this and the man he had brought me here to see?

"I'll tell you all that in a minute," he said, guessing my thought again, "but this, for two different reasons, is the very best moment at which I could have produced him. In the first place, it takes a tremendous flood of stout, in pints and bottles, to float any new intellectual group whatsoever; and, secondly, look at the way our man is coping with the situation!"

The agility was terrific now. The aged "curate" seemed to be everywhere along the bar at the one time. Pints or bottles were all the same to him; they were there instantly upon the order to carry on the flood of talk. His pulling of pints was the fastest thing I had ever seen in all my life; his cork-drawing of armfuls of bottled stout was marvellous to behold. And if, for an order, he had only, say, three stouts to deal with, he would add a flourish to the performance. He would throw the bottles up as small Indian clubs and keep them nicely in the air for a few seconds before bringing them successfully to the pull.

"You're taking it all in, I hope," said George.

I nodded without speaking. My eye had wandered to the man at the far end of the bar whom I took to be the proprietor, deLacy himself. He was helping by pulling an occasional pint, but only in a soft, leisurely way, his eye half upon his assistant all the time. But once, at a perilous moment of the Indian club act, I saw that a look of horror had jumped into his quiet face. That had been on account of the risk to the bottles, of course, and at the dreadful thought of a total loss to him spilling away on the floor.

"You're evidently admiring the show of alleged youth the lad is putting up," said George, making me hear above the din of the intellectuals, "but that's not the whole of it; it's not for nothing that we find him here. He took up this job only a few days ago, for the express purpose of being close to everything that's going to happen down the lane to-night."

"But what *is* going to happen?"

"You don't follow these things, I know, but do you mean to say that you have never heard of Little Biddy Flynn?"

I confessed, by a blank look, that I had never heard of the little lady before.

"I know you don't follow dog-racing either, but Little Biddy Flynn is called after the famous lucky greyhound of the name, and she has a mother behind her shoving her on, and, I believe, a grandmother shoving on the mother. If you knew anything about the pictures, the films, you'd see what the idea is at once—another Mary Pickford, after all the years without one, another world's darling, and then—money to burn, in one or two places!"

"But I quite fail to see, George," I said, indicating the man behind the bar by a helpless gesture . . .

"I'm coming to that as fast as I can," he said, a little impatiently. "The lady in question is getting her big chance to-night through the instrumentality of this new group. She's the star of



their show down the lane, and if all goes well they say that nothing will stop her from Hollywood. The two talent scouts who've been at the Gresham all the week are seeing her. She's showing her paces in these three one-act plays, each with a slightly different kind of darling in it. Don't you realise what that means, man, what's at stake?"

"But for the lad there?"

"Yes, for the lad there, as well!"

There was now a sudden change upon the scene. A head had popped in to say that the curtain was just about to go up on the second play, and in a few seconds the crowd had vanished. George's story could now proceed more clearly, less jerkily, for calm had descended upon deLacy's. DeLacy himself was leaning over at the head of the bar talking in an undertone to an elderly, unexcited regular customer. The young-old man who so recently had seemed so alive behind the bar now appeared suddenly to be showing his age. There were heavy beads of perspiration upon his forehead and his eyes looked wild. He was making a brave, but bewildered effort, I thought, to deal with the vast number of used glasses and tumblers that had been left behind from the rush.

He would stop from time to time in his rinsing and wiping, and his eyes would look out far away, deLacy's eyelids lifting heavily at such moments to give him such a dangerous glance as made me feel that our man's sojourn in this place was not destined to be long. I had called for another drink, and feeling perhaps that a further show of agility was now necessary, he had vaulted across the counter to bring it to our table, and then back and forward again to deal with the payment. Again glancing in the proprietor's direction, I observed that deLacy had taken a poor view of these athletics.

"Take a close-up of him now," George had whispered while the operation of the drink was proceeding, but, trying the gambit of the weather in an attempt to draw him into conversation, he had merely said: "Thank you, sir!" to me for the money, and again only: "Thank you, sir!" when he brought back the change.

"You saw that," George said, "not a flicker of recognition of me, not a word out of him to a native of his own place, although he knows well of my interest in him always. But silence is his portion now, a punishment, no doubt, for the sins of his past life, for he was once the damndest talker in all Ireland. Haven't you taken notice of the wide mouth, the soft, mobile lips, the set of the jaw for prate?"

"But you haven't told me who he is yet, George?"

"His story is finishing now, possibly this very night, so you'll have to hear the start of it to get the full effect. He was born and bred in one of those little villages of our Sainted Isle where they spend their whole time talking about one another, finding out things about one another, stinging one another with their tongues. He hails from the village of Assigh, and, believe me, you'd heave a sigh too—to be out of it at once—if you ever found yourself there. Nothing but one long-drawn whisper going up and

down the one street all day, and the same thing all round the place, in little poisonous gusts, all night. Well, Garrett Reilly was born there a little over sixty years ago."

"So that's his name—Garrett Reilly?"

"Does it suggest anything to you at all? No?"

"I can't say that it does, not just all at once."

"Now, I don't know this for certain. I can't say, for an absolute fact, if it had a deciding effect upon the formation of his character. It may have been pure accident or mere coincidence that that became his name. But, when a man is so unlucky as to have been linked at his christening with a proverbial saying, nearly anything can happen to him. Do you mean to tell me that you have never heard the saying?"

"The world and Garrett Reilly *knows*?"

"Ungrammatical, of course, for I don't think you could collect the two correctly into one noun, but there must be a lot in it all the same. I don't know how old the saying is, but he's about sixty-three, and he may be the original Garrett Reilly, for all we know to the contrary."

"I see," I said, glancing a little uneasily at George. I had had samples of his peculiar style of humour, and I had a strong notion this time that he might be merely making up the story as he went along.

"You see, there is this in it, for a certainty, anyhow: he set out to fulfil the destiny that was marked out for him in the saying. He set out to know everything—in a small way. In the course of his development, it became his fierce ambition to know everything about everybody in his native place. I leave you to figure it out for yourself, but, if he wasn't the original Garrett Reilly, why did he begin, at a certain point in his career, to act the part so perfectly?"

I found myself suddenly quite unable to frame any kind of answer to that question, and George went on, not realising perhaps that he was now speaking himself—and so much in character, too—as one native of Assigh of another.

"The curious thing about him is that once before he was all silence, as silent as he is now. It was his outstanding feature as a very young man. I remember him when I was only a nipper buying sweets, and he had already come by sheer cuteness—and silence—to be the foreman of Murray's, the biggest grocery and provision shop in the village. Only the barest minimum of talk from him always, and a fixed, business-like smile. You can see for yourself from the deep tracks around his mouth, and all the little wrinkles at the corners of his eyes, that he must have smiled an awful lot like that in his time. And to see him making up a parcel! Well, you have seen something of his speed now with bottles of stout. It was the same then with tea and sugar, only, if anything, faster. He was a great favourite with the women who dealt at Murray's, on account of the value they thought he always gave them, and because he looked wise beyond his years, as well as kind of shy. What he might have risen to in business, by



keeping his ears open and his mouth shut, it is almost impossible to imagine now—if the little thing hadn't happened that twisted the whole course of a once promising career."

George went over to the bar for two more drinks before proceeding.

"But a small, pushing schoolmaster from Kerry had started a Dramatic Class in Assigh, to keep the people from talking, as he thought; and that was the beginning of it, for the lad's boss, John Murray, had a taste for dramatics and ordered him into the Class for the production of a Robert Emmet play by the little schoolmaster. He didn't want to have anything to do with the thing at all, for, in his wisdom at the time, it looked a kind of silly to him; but soon he was into it in a big way, for, against all his protests, he was cast for the part of me bould Robert himself, with Minnie Kelly as Sarah Curran, and John Murray as Leonard McNally, the spy and informer.

"Various accounts of the production have survived—I was too young at the time to be let go to a play so I didn't see it myself—but, putting one version of the affair with another, it would appear that Garrett Reilly had turned out only a wishy-washy sort of an Emmet, not dashing enough at all for a hero, although that was probably only because his boss was on the stage, or in the "wings" looking hard at his performance all the time. Minnie Kelly was very nice, they said, as Sarah Curran, a lovely girl; and John Murray simply tremendous as McNally, of whom he made a powerful villain altogether and so much like the real thing that he was called "The Informer, Murray" for years after.

"But enough had happened to decide that Garrett Reilly was going to be a different man from that night on. In one of the love scenes he had had to give Minnie Kelly a big kiss, at which there was a cheer that shook the parochial hall to its foundations. Ah, ha! So he wasn't as shy as he let on to be in the shop after all! It must have taken a considerable amount of practice in private to have done a thing like that so natural in public! The girl's name was "up", as they said, with his at once, and all next day there were the wildest rumours flying around the village! Minnie's father threatened to stop the second night's showing of the play if the kiss wasn't cut out! And there was another man mad as well—John Murray, for he had got to like Minnie greatly at the rehearsals, and surely he wasn't going to let a grand girl like that go to a mere lad in his own shop!

"Well, I suppose you can see what had to happen out of that sort of a situation. John Murray was married to Minnie Kelly inside a month; a great match for her, everyone said, and all through the Dramatic Class. But the Dramatic Class was finished for good on the head of it; and of course it was clear that there couldn't be room for a hero and a heroine and a villain all under the one roof, especially when the heroine was married to the villain. So Garrett Reilly had to go, but it was a bad day for Murray's business when he parted with him, as things turned out.

"The hero had to spend a while at home thinking himself

out, but in six months time he had started on his own in Garry's old shop. And it was there that he had to begin to talk—to work up the new business and to keep himself to the fore in the place, for there were certain parties inclined to laugh at him still for the way he had lost Minnie Kelly. He had to meet talk with talk and grins with a grin. He had to get to know things about people. He had to know everything that was going on, underhand and overhand.

"The night they had let the awful roar out of them when he kissed Minnie in the play! He would never be able to forget that, for he had fallen in love with the girl and was going to ask her to run away with as soon as *Robert Emmet* was over. She was Mrs. Murray now instead of being Mrs. Reilly, but they would never make a jeer of him again! They would be afraid to open their mouths about him, seeing that he knew so much about the whole of them! They would be so much afraid of him that they would have to deal with him in his shop whether they liked it or not! For there he was now behind his own counter, always talking, talking about everyone . . . He was terrific on Assigh, and the whole population knew what a terror he was with the tongue. When they wanted to say the worst thing about one another, they would start off with: "Now, the world and Garrett Reilly knows . . ."

I was finding it just a little hard to believe that the rather obliterated man now wiping the last of the glasses could ever have been the man that George was depicting. I had signalled: "The same, again!" and he came over to us with the drinks, slowly this time and by way of the opening at the end of the counter instead of vaulting over it. There was a fixed stare in his eyes, as if he had something greatly on his mind. He did not speak at all.

"The seeds of his downfall were present, no doubt, in the immense capacity for talk that he developed then," went on George, "but he had a good while to go yet even though the years were passing. He had taken the best part of Murray's business away from him and kept it, and it was seen that maybe Minnie Kelly hadn't made such a great match after all.

"There was a family of four now nearly grown-up girls there and it was said that their mother used to be always thinking of the stage and the great future as an actress she had missed by marrying at all. And it was known, too, that Murray was blaming a lot of the whole thing on the name, "The Informer, Murray," that had stuck to him since *Robert Emmet*, there being a wave of national hatred at the time for all traitors, living or dead.

"D'ye know, I pity the poor man between everything, honestly, I do," the lad there would say, "but maybe these little girls of his will soon be able to give him a hand?"

"A good many of the young people were moving off from Assigh, coming up here to Dublin, mostly, to look for whatever jobs they could find. A rumour would go out that one of them had landed a grand job altogether, but your man wouldn't believe it. No, not until he had found out for himself. And it was this finding-out that started him to leave Assigh an odd time after all



the years. It began with an occasional run up to Dublin on a Sunday or a holiday, to see would he hear anything . . . I took a turn at observing him about this time, for I still went back to Assigh for my holidays and often dropped into his shop for a packet of cigarettes. I knew that he knew all about me, the exact nature of my job here, the salary I had, and so on, but what he didn't seem to be aware of was that I was following his career just as closely as he was following mine.

"After a while, there was nothing for him but to take on an assistant, so that he might be able to have a few days off from time to time and come back with a bit of the naked truth about some of the Assigh people who were supposed to be doing something wonderful in Dublin, their relations bragging their heads off about them. He stopped a good deal of bragging through these visits, but it still went on. Often, he would have to spend as long as a week away to find out something exactly about someone. And the next thing was, that Maisie, the eldest of the Murray girls, was off to Dublin, to a drapery shop in George's Street. 'I had a look at it the last day I was in town, and, whisper, it's a very small, unimportant class of a shop,' he told everyone. But he was worried about the matter all the same. He would have to keep an eye upon Maisie Murray up there above all things. A soft little girl like that all by herself in the city!

"So two or three evenings a week I would see him standing on the opposite side of George's Street to watch Maisie coming out of the shop after six, and, what do you think, to follow her at a distance all the way over to her 'digs' in Dolphin's Barn!"

The story was beginning to take shape at last. This certainly looked like a development. And George, after a glance at me, seemed to be fully alive to the needs of the narrative at this point.

"Here, however, is where I have to be a little imaginative for the moment," he said, "and guess at the nature of the change that began to take place in our man about this time. It may have been on one of his walks back from Dolphin's Barn that the thought came to him. It was clear that the case of Maisie Murray was something which would require his whole attention, at least for the present. He couldn't leave her here with no one to look after her.

"He was forty now. He had saved a bit and he had built up a sound business in Garry's old shop, but it would suffer if he was going to devote the best part of his time to Dublin, which had now become for him the heart of things. Still, was there anything to prevent him selling out well in Assigh and starting in Dublin? The scope of the city appealed to him, the larger field of talk that he now felt himself capable of covering; to be able to deal with names that were known all over the country, instead of the few people in one small corner of it that he had talked nearly out of existence. And, besides, with the disappearance of his deadly competition, John Murray might have his chance again—for the sake of the other little girls, the way they could have bits of fortunes and marry farmers from round about the place later on.

"Upon his return to Assigh, he pondered the idea for several weeks. He felt that he might be able to do a whole lot of good in Dublin; they seemed to want a bit of a pulling together up there. The place wanted a bit of looking after, now that it had become the seat of Government. He had already seen well-known political figures knocking around in the evenings, actually going into pubs for drinks. That was a nice state of affairs, wasn't it? But a pub might be the very thing for him now, a place where one could hear things that were going on in a big way. That small bar in the very centre of the city, shortly to be on the market! It would be a magnificent investment, and permanent residence in the city would put him in the way of solving many things that had baffled him up to the present.

"So, to the surprise of the whole population, he suddenly sold out in Assigh and went to live in Dublin—on his money, which was the report he spread before he left. But it was really to spend the proceeds of the sale, and nearly all his savings, on the purchase of 'The Green Man'. He changed the name of the place to 'The Assigh Bar' which was significant, but it was a bad mistake for a calculating man to have made. It seemed that people very quickly began to forget the fame of the house, or even where it was, now that the old name was gone. He could not see on any day the rush of business into it that he had observed before he bought it. But that would be all right when he had settled down to work. As soon as he had quite recovered from the loss of his consuming interest in Assigh—and it was something that he missed sorely—he would make a new Assigh for himself here.

"He began by getting into talk familiarly with the customers who remained. To set them all talking about one another confidentially to him was what he aimed at. He would soon have the place one seething mass of talk about Dublin and its more notable figures. People would be crushing in in droves to hear the latest about those who might be so foolish as to stay away for one evening . . . But somehow the plan didn't seem to be working; it was not gathering the momentum of numbers. His clients were actually getting fewer and those that were left seemed to resent his familiarity and his burning desire to know all about their affairs, what they were working at, how much they were making a year, and so on. He couldn't understand it at all.

"He had two assistants, but they appeared to be merely for show. People from Assigh, myself included, I must confess, used to drop in from time to time to see how he was getting on. Once, at night, he leaned over to me confidentially and said: 'This is a *day* house, mostly; you should see the rush here up to about six o'clock.' And on another occasion—in the daytime—catching me looking around for the crowd that wasn't there, he had said to me excitedly: 'This is more of a *night* house now than it used to be; the crowd that does be here from six to about half ten is something huge!

"Looking at him now," continued George, after a glance in the direction of the bar, "I see that he has still every one of the

deep creases which began to plough into his forehead about that time. He stuck 'The Assigh Bar' for three years through flickering and fading hopes of improvement, and with something else to worry him the whole of every day. For Maisie Murray, remembering that her mother was an actress one time, had taken to the stage. I happen to be in a position to tell you something of the shock our man got when he heard that she had joined a group of amateurs on the outskirts of the city and was going to appear in *The Courting of Mary Doyle*. He dragged himself to see the play and thought it a shame to see her mixed up with such a gang. It was something that would have to be stopped!

"I happened to be there the very same night, and I could see how mad he was at seeing her upon the stage at all. I could actually hear him groaning to himself all through the show, and when it was over he darted around to the back of the stage, to advise her, I thought. I wanted to have a word with one of the chaps out of the office who was in the cast, so I saw what happened with my own eyes. Maisie was introducing our man to the leading actor. 'This is Cecil, my fiancée, Mr. Cecil Flynn—Mr. Reilly, Mr. Garrett Reilly from Assigh'. 'The man wot *knows*' was the remark that fell from Cecil, as the two men started to size one another up.

"Our man had been looking after Maisie—from a distance, all the time and now this had happened! A fiancée already, and a proper jackeen, too, from the looks of him! How was he going to keep the girl, what did he do for a living, if he did anything at all? But in a few minutes time we all knew what it was. What Cecil did was 'something to do with the dogs', and he seemed delighted to hear of what Mr. Garrett Reilly did. He said he would look him up shortly, drop in for a chat about things.

"And he did. In fact, he became one of the most constant patrons of 'The Assigh Bar'. And the proprietor of that establishment, feeling that he still had to look after Maisie Murray began to fall under the pernicious influence of Mr. Cecil Flynn.

"Cecil used to give big tips for the dog races, and he had big ideas about business, too. He put forward the notion that 'The Assigh Bar' was losing hand over fist by not turning itself into a 'dog' house. 'You see what I mean', he would say. 'All the other gangs have special pubs of their own, the racing men and the bookies; the literary gang and the journalists; the pubs around the theatres are always full of old actors, talking about plays and the parts that they played in their time. A certain type of picture on the walls of a pub does the trick. What you want here is pictures of famous dogs on the walls, from Master McGrath down. And you'll want to get to know all about dogs, the way you can talk about them to the crush that'll be coming in here then. You could come with Maisie and me an odd time to Harold's Cross or Shelbourne Park and start to find out about them there.'

"And our man went like a lamb. He went a whole lot. He got very deep into dogs. He became a well-known figure at the tracks, rushing here and there at the last minute to put a bit on



something Cecil said was going to win, only it didn't. He would nearly deafen you with all he knew of the 'form' of dogs. He even bought a dog himself and, hoping for a long line of winners, called him 'Assigh the First'. But he was never first, and there was no 'Assigh the Second'. He backed Cecil and Maisie in the Bank for the purchase of a house and they were married. That would keep her off the stage, he thought, but it didn't. The poor girl had to go in for acting more or less professionally now and try for small parts at the different theatres, because of the kind of a husband she had found in Cecil.

"The proprietor of 'The Assigh Bar' had already had more than enough proof of his real quality. The working-up of the house as a 'dog' house hadn't come to anything. Followers of the mechanical hare seemed to prefer the few seconds' fleeting vision of the fancies for the moment on the tracks to long looks at pictures of famous dead dogs on the walls all night. Our man was already in deep water with the Bank, and it was in vain that he tried to recover himself by such measures of retrenchment as the sacking of the two assistants. The rest is silence so far as 'The Assigh Bar' was concerned. The Bank couldn't stand it any longer and sold him up."

George's narrative was suddenly broken by an excited cry:

"They're coming; they're coming . . . To say, to say . . .!"

We jumped in our seats for the words had come from behind the counter where there had been practically nothing but silence since the disappearance of the crowd. DeLacy jumped, as if electrified by the sudden shock to his ears. He moved darkly down to the spot from which the sound had originated, looking dangerous as he pulled at his heavy, old R.I.C. moustache. "What's this at all?" he roared. "D'ye mean to say you're after making up your mind to go mad on me?"

There was no answer from the excited "curate", but just at that moment the door crashed open and the rush from the second interval of the new group's show was all over the floor. There were not so many this time, and there seemed to be a certain calm upon them, as if something that had been a little in doubt were now assured. But there was a great hurry of drinking, nevertheless, and much talk, for all of which our man had a most eager ear. The actions of pouring and pulling, and trying hard to hear at the same time, were not successfully co-ordinating, and there was much spilling and messing, all of which deLacy was observing with lowering eye. George had managed to secure another drink for us, but only by getting deLacy himself to fill the two half ones. While I kept my eye on the scene, George was now proceeding with the story, as well as he could make me hear him against the din.

"Well, for a good while after the fiasco of 'The Assigh Bar', our man must have been in a poor financial state. I used to see him often, slipping along on the opposite side of the street from me, without ever once being able to come face to face with him. I imagined that he hadn't quite so much interest in Assigh people in Dublin now, and that he must be looking hard for the job that

he mightn't be getting it so easy to find.

"But, in far-out off-license houses and grocery establishments, he began by degrees to appear, apparently, however, only in a temporary capacity always. He was scarcely ever there at any place the second time one called, even though the interval might have been only a short one. It was not, I fancied, that he would not be able to secure a permanent position if he liked to stay in any place for long. But people from Assigh, or related to people in Assigh, would always be discovering his whereabouts most unaccountably, and dropping in to have a word with him about the people back down at home, although he never seemed to want to talk to anyone now. And when that began to happen too frequently in any one place he would give notice and be off to some other establishment, where, soon enough he knew, it would be bound to happen all over again.

"It would seem that all the people he had ever wanted to find out anything about were running all over the city now, trying to find out where he was or what he was doing. And had he anything at all, you will ask, to lift his mind up out of the little hell he had made for himself? Well, he had, just the one thing, his interest in Maisie Flynn and her family, for she was now introducing the little girls to the stage, getting them on in children's parts, just barely to keep the home going, he was full sure.

"Still, he had an idea that they were being helped a little from the country. Maybe he had done one good thing, by clearing out and giving Murray a chance of recovering even some of his lost business. He had seen Mrs. Murray up for one or two of her daughter's shows at the Queen's and it had delighted him in a most peculiar way. She was a grand woman altogether, still, with her other daughters married fairly well, and it pleased him greatly to think that he could follow the fortunes of the whole of them still—at a distance.

"Poor Maisie, Minnie's daughter, would never be able to get to the top now, after all the hack playing she had done, but her three girls, Cecily, Peg and Biddy, might do something big yet, particularly Biddy who was most like her grandmother. She had already made a sort of a name for herself as 'Little Biddy Flynn', her father having insisted that she should appear only under that famous winning greyhound's name in every show. 'She was one of the fastest little bitches in her day, and I have a hunch that our Biddy is going to mean a break for us some time', Cecil would say, as he hung around the theatre bars, a most desperate character now in the eyes of our man."

George had pulled the story closer together. I had the connection at last between what was happening near-by to-night and the man behind the bar. But the agility he had shown in the first interval had given place to what now appeared a nervous constriction of all his limbs. He wasn't hurrying as before, and several groups of drinkers were banging on the counter with their empty glasses; others had not yet been served at all. George and myself had already caught some of it, and we could see that his eyes were

dancing in his head at what he was hearing presently of the possible future of Little Biddy Flynn. DeLacy, now forced to activity himself, looked like a man who had made up his mind!

The head had popped in again to announce the third play and the bar was almost empty once more. Our man was staring at the array of empty bottles and soiled glasses on the counter, but he was not moving either hand or foot. Suddenly, there was a great shout from him:

"It's in the bag! It's in the bag! It's in the bag!"

DeLacy, out of respect for his establishment, was holding himself in, as if by a terrific effort, but we saw that the show-down that was coming could not be far off now.

"I wonder does our man realise how very near he is to the sack at the present moment," remarked George. "The poor devil! The last few years have been hard on him, but he stuck them for sake of the one thing—his interest in the Flynns. He had to keep on the move because of the interest that certain parties had in him, but the jobs he could get were becoming fewer and fewer. He had been a long time in Dublin and the years were in on top of him at last. To hold even temporary employment, he always had to put up the show of youth that you have seen this evening. But it has never lasted for long, and this time the test was harder than usual. His interest in the Flynns was coming to a climax as well."

The door opened again and three important-looking young men entered.

"The three Directors of the New Group," whispered George, excitedly. "It must be in the bag now all right!"

"Three stouts", one of the Directors called.

But there was not a flicker of movement in the man behind the bar. If one could picture the complete stoppage of a human being through sheer excitement, we were looking at that stoppage now.

"I never thought we'd do it, Jerem, with our very first show?"

"Oh, but Biddy was just marvellous to-night," said the one who had been addressed as "Jerem."

"Just imagine, she'll be in Hollywood next week," said the third young man. "The two guys at the Gresham are giving her the contract to-night!"

It was not until he had heard that that Garrett Reilly moved. Then three bottles of stout went into the air, but this time, unfortunately, not to come successfully to the pull. In the excitement of the moment, his hand had lost its cunning. There was a crash and deLacy descended to view his loss with horror in his eyes. For a moment he was speechless with rage, but then words came to him in a rush:

"The world and Garrett Reilly *knows* . . . !" he roared. "Such a night as I'm after having looking at you! Me heart was in me mouth the whole time! Take that apron off you and put on your coat and get to hell oura this! Excuse me, gentlemen, let me serve you myself . . . three stouts, gentlemen, you said . . ."

But the Directors, full of their own excitement, had taken



little or no notice of the incident, and the one whose name had been mentioned as part of a well-known saying seemed to be beyond reality too. Yet, out of his dazed condition, he at last found speech which he addressed to the Directors:

"So they're . . . they *are* taking her for Hollywood . . . Little Biddy Flynn?"

"It's about the quickest thing, old man, that ever happened in Dublin . . . we put her over all right . . . all she wanted was a bit of real production . . ."

"So you . . . ? *She* was the Far-Away Princess to-night, of course? The poor, lovely, delightful little thing, and every inch the part!"

"She knocked them completely stiff . . . But hurry up, boys; we're all going on to the Gresham, aren't we . . . Biddy, the mother, and the grandmother. The old one is up from the country—with the grandfather no less. They must have been dead certain we were on a winner to-night . . . Oh, ho! You can't whack the crowd from the greyhound country . . . They always kind of know, don't they? . . . But how are we going to pull out ourselves? . . . We'd have been about square on the night, I think, if it weren't costing us so much to keep that drunken blighter, Cecil Flynn, out of view for the evening . . . Until everything is fixed up about Biddy . . . But then we're going to be properly on the map, aren't we?"

"Excuse me for a few minutes," said George, suddenly, "I think, maybe, if I were to have a few words with John Murray down at the show . . ." And he was gone.

"Get out from behind me bar!" ordered deLacy to the wreck of a "curate", who was now shivering there. "Here's your money up to the end of the week! But I couldn't be looking at you, nor, what's more, listening to you, another minute longer! Begod, it was atrocious!"

Garrett Reilly moved out and having taken off his apron began slowly to put on his coat. In what had become his stunned condition, the movement of his arms into the sleeves seemed a most painful effort. It took him several minutes to put on the coat. Then he stood looking out into space, and I thought, from the slight movement of his lips, that he must be murmuring to himself: "The Far-Away Princess . . . The Far-Away Princess . . ."

The three Directors were talking excitedly in undertones about the future of the New Group, and I was alone with my thoughts of Garrett Reilly and his story, but it was not to be for long. The door had crashed open once more and George was back, bringing with him a heavy, elderly man who now stared around for a moment before catching sight of the desolate figure on the floor.

"Well, indambut!" he exclaimed, "if it isn't Garrett Reilly himself! For years I'm after being trying to locate you all over the city, but you were always just gone from the last place you were in whenever anyone tried to find you for me. Be the holy farmer, but you're standing it well, Garrett! Will you ever forget the night you pled Robert Emmet and kissed the missus on me?"

... I want to talk to you about something that Mr. Barden here is after putting into my head though I think it was there all the time ... And then you'll have to come along with us. We're all going on to the Gresham, the missus and all. The fillum people are throwing a spread—all on account of Biddeen Flynn, imagine! Did you ever hear the bate of it? She's going to be a shtar, and we'll be all made up. I was just thinking that she might be able to wangle a part for me in some of the fillums and a part for the missus as well, to play forenist me ... Now, wouldn't that be grand? I know you never cared much about acting yourself, Garrett, for you wrote Robert Emmet's epitaph the very first night you pled him, and years and years before his country took her place among the nations of the earth; but you could be looking after the shop for us while we'd be away in Hollywood making the dough ... And that's the very thing I want you to do now. Come on over here till I tell you. ..."

"There, you have it all now," said George, resuming his drink, "a modern Irish fairytale, although I'm sure you wouldn't have believed a word of it if you hadn't come in here with me to-night and seen it working out for yourself. The lad here will go back to Assigh and take up where he left off about forty years ago. Can you beat that for a happy ending? But he'll be happy there behind Murray's counter, for it is the only place where he ever was happy. He'll be looking after the business again as no one else ever looked after it, and whatever happens, or doesn't happen, about the grandfather and the grandmother he'll be following the starry future of Little Biddy Flynn as they twinkle her out from Hollywood all over the world. She'll be always the Far-Away Princess to him and he'll be adoring her in his mind. Still, in spite of the deficiencies in his make-up, I believe there must have been something noble in him all the same, for just think of all that long devotion to the memory of one kiss. Why, you'd have to go back to some old play like *Cyrano de Bergerac*, in a production by this New Group gang, to find anything like it. Imagine, the first and only girl he ever kissed, the grandmother that he lost; then, her daughter, about whom he worried so much that he nearly lost his wits; now, the grand-daughter whose little career he has followed breathlessly from the start! It was a pity, of course, that he got twisted by the cheer they gave him for that kiss in Assigh, but he's going to be twisted back now and straightened up. For, as sure as we're sitting here, the makings of the star will kiss him later on, some time in the course of the evening, the very same as if he were her grandfather, and then he can go back as good as ever to Assigh. ..."

"Yes, it is rather amazing, George," I couldn't help saying, "the way the whole thing has worked out. ..."

"But don't you know well," George said, looking hard at me, "why, the world and Garrett Reilly *knows*—now—that such things *can* happen?"

## REARDEN CONNER

### *THE TINKER'S CAT*

THE wagon, pulled by a thin, tired horse, lurched along the narrow road, setting up little clouds of dust. It was a tinker's wagon, and its curved hood and sides were hung with pots and pans of every description which clattered and banged as the creaking wheels jogged into the holes on the road.

A little boy sat at the back of the wagon, staring down at the plumes of dust. He watched the molecules dancing in the shafts of sunlight as if they were glad to be released from the sullen, lifeless roadway. On his lap he had a grey kitten which he was stroking absentmindedly.

Before they had travelled very far down the road something went wrong with the harness on the horse. The driver, a sharp-faced, black-haired man, jumped down from his perch and swore at the horse. He juggled with the straps on the harness, then he walked round to the back of the wagon and spotted the boy caressing the kitten.

"Why the devil don't you do something to help!" he shouted. "Didn't I tell you before not to waste your time nursing that cat!"

His face seemed to swell with fury and his beady eyes flashed in the sunlight like blobs of water against a dark stone. He thrust out his hand and grabbed the kitten; then with an easy swing of his arm he threw it over the roadside ditch.

The shock to the kitten was profound. It landed on its legs with a thud in a bed of lush grass. Suddenly a green world seemed to rush up and engulf it. For several moments it crouched against the earth, almost stunned by the fall. It could hear the rumble of the wheels as the wagon was pulled away down the road and the cry of the boy who had been its friend and master.

Slowly it raised its head and felt the long grass tickling its ears. There were tall buttercups among the grasses, growing undisturbed and throwing out long branches on which flowers glistened like little cups of gold. Several docks raised their rust-like spears, and the sky-blue flowers of scabious swayed as if in a dream-like dance.

The kitten was terrified by these sights and movements. It had known no world beyond the tinker's wagon. It crouched low once more, trembling with fear; then it turned and crawled towards the ditch and leaped on to the road.

The tinker's wagon had gone by this time. There was nothing but the long strip of worn road ahead of it. Slowly it began to crawl after the wagon, the hair on its belly almost touching the dust. The gurgle of water reached its ears and it raised its head



and sniffed. Thirst was beginning to ravage it. The dust of the road was thick on its narrow tongue and the heat of the sun made it totter with fatigue. In its brain there was the instinct to drink and sleep, to forget the heat and the dust and even the loss of the little boy.

It crept over the ditch once more and it found itself on the edge of a stream. The water in the stream looked black after the brightness of the dusty road. It leaped and splashed over stones and seemed to laugh like the little boy as if at some secret joke.

The kitten stood on the bank of the stream and felt a cool, sweet breath coming from the water. It craned its head forward to drink, but at that moment it heard a strange and unsettling sound. Ducks were quacking lower down on the stream. They had been disporting themselves and the sight of the kitten had disturbed them. A green-headed drake struggled out of the water and waddled along the bank towards the kitten. It had wickedness in its bright, button eyes and its beak was stretched out in readiness for attack.

The kitten fled before this new enemy. It leaped the ditch and ran down the road, its heart throbbing in its breast. After a few minutes it came to a clearing at the side of the road and it saw a small house set a few yards back from the thoroughfare. An old man was sitting on a stool outside the open doorway of the house. He had a large straw hat, which had belonged to his dead wife, on his head and he was dressed in a tattered shirt and a scraggy trousers. His feet were bare to the world and at that moment he was contemplating his toes with the air of a philosopher.

The kitten stared at him in amazement. The man shifted his gaze from his toes and spotted the animal before it had time to turn tail. His rugged, bearded face broke into a smile, revealing a toothless mouth. "Puss! Puss!" he said in a gentle tone, "Here, Puss! Puss!"

The kitten felt the warmth and tenderness of his voice and fear left its heart. Its eyes blinked and grew limpid, and it became conscious once more of its great thirst.

"Here, Puss . . ." the man was continuing, "come and have a drop of milk. . . ."

He stood up from the stool and went into the house. The kitten stared at the vacant seat and wondered what would happen next. If crept nearer to the house, wary in its movements, still uncertain of its reception. The man came out of the house with a saucer of milk and set it down near the leg of the stool.

"There you are, my fine fellow!" he said. "And have you come a long way? You look a travelled cat by the dust on your coat. My name is Jeremiah Daly. Will you be so good as to tell me yours?"

The kitten bent over the saucer, comforted by the man's words, and lapped at the milk eagerly.

"An army marches on its belly . . ." the man went on, "and the same is true of a cat. Drink up, my merry one, for you look as if you're wall-falling with the hunger."

He sat on the stool once more and gazed at the kitten in affection. Then, when the milk was finished, he bent and picked up the kitten and began to stroke it. "Come on into the cool of the house," he said. "You look tired out. Have you been tramping the roads or what? I'm a lonely man, without chick or child, and you're welcome in my humble home. I have three cows, two pigs, and a goat . . . but the devil a word can I say to the cantankerous beasts!"

He carried the kitten into the kitchen of the house and placed it on a cushioned chair. "There you are, my proud beauty!" he said, "Isn't that a couch fit for a king? If you curl up now and go to sleep maybe you'll wake up and think you're come to a palace. And maybe you won't go no more a-roving. It's as good here as anywhere, I may tell you. And you'll be company for me when the winter nights come."

He rambled on and on while the kitten swayed on the cushioned chair with weariness. It crouched lower and lower and soon it was curled round in a deep, obliterating sleep. The man sat and watched it, smoking a time-withered pipe and looking down at his naked toes every now and again as if distrustful of their presence.

When the kitten woke at last it yawned, rose, and arched its back and looked steadily at the man. By this time it had forgotten the little boy in the tinker's wagon and its encounter with the fierce drake. The man stood up and poured milk into the saucer once more. He held the saucer to its nose and watched it drink with something like pride in his eyes.

"And where have you come from?" he said again. "Have you come over the hills and far away? But sure you couldn't travel far with the short legs you have. Maybe whoever owns you will be down here after you in a bit."

He grew alarmed at this thought. He turned his head to right and left and a crafty look came into his eyes. "They're all of them down here after me if you only knew the truth," he said to the kitten. "It's the money they want. They know that I have a tidy bit, and that I don't believe in banks. But I've hidden it in notes all over the house . . . in seventeen places, no less . . . and sometimes I forget where the places are and then I have to sit and think hard."

He sat now as if he were thinking hard once more; then he rose and called out to the kitten, "There's a bit of meat in the press at the back there. Let's see you sink your teeth in that. It's a great big cat I want you to grow into."

It was a fine time for the kitten for weeks afterwards. The man fussed over it as if it were a lost child returning to his bosom. He fed it so often that it had little time for anything but sleep. Sometimes he took a string and played with it on the kitchen floor, laughing heartily as it chased the end of the string or boxed a ball of paper with its delicate paws. Whenever the hens or ducks tried to peck at it he chased them away with a shocked, proprietorial air. And all the time he talked to it, talked and talked as if

hungry for the sound of his own voice, pouring out his troubles and fears and philosophies while it perched on the kitchen floor and washed its face with slow, dainty movements of its paws.

It grew strong and fat and lived the life of a parasite. Sometimes it chased the mice in the outhouses, but it was still afraid of the fowl and terrified of the goat that was tethered in the haggart.

Autumn came and the old man took to lighting an old lamp to chase the shadows away in the kitchen of his house. It was a tall ornamental lamp with a coloured glass container and it had been the pride of his wife for many years. The kitten was in the habit of squatting on the table under the lamp as if basking in the wash of light. One night the goat in the haggart began to cry out in pain. Soon it would have a kid and the old man was distressed at its suffering. He rose and left the house at the first cry from the goat and the kitten watched him go with a lazy curiosity.

At that moment a moth came in past the door, which the old man had left ajar. It hovered around the kitchen for a few minutes, bobbing here and there against the walls in a kind of blind panic, and then it was drawn to the light from the lamp. It was a large, brown moth, and the kitten was fascinated by the sight of it.

The moth leaped up and down against the globe of the lamp, its wings humming in an ecstasy of frustration. The kitten crouched lower and lower against the table. Its tail began to lash in its excitement. Then it leaped at the moth, thrusting its front paws against the globe of the lamp.

The heavy lamp lurched over and crashed to the floor. The kitten leaped from the table and fled through the doorway in terror. It ran across the clearing in front of the house and disappeared into a clump of cool grass.

The old man was too busy with the goat at the end of the haggart to heed the crash of the lamp. The first sound that reached his ears was the crackling of burning wood. He turned and saw that his house was on fire and that long tongues of flame were jabbing up at the gloom of the deepening night.

"The money!" he shouted, rushing away from the suffering goat. "The money . . . in seventeen places!"

He leaped like a youth across the haggart, but when he reached the house the heat was intense. The moment he stepped within a yard of it his wild hair and beard began to singe. Again and again he tried to push his way forward, but the flames licked him back, curling round the edges of the windows and the doorway as if mocking him.

When his neighbours found him later he was sitting on the side of the ditch opposite his ruined house, crying out in a loud voice, "I'm a pauper . . . a pauper, I tell you! Every penny I had was devoured in there by the wicked flames!"

It was a long time before he saw the kitten again. By that time he had sold his three cows and pigs and his goat had died in giving birth to its kid. He was working as a farm labourer and



living in a loft and thankful for a place to rest his tired limbs.

The kitten had grown to a cat, and its sides were lean and sunken as if it spent much of its time on the prowl. The old man recognised it by its grey colouring and wide eyes. "Here, Puss! . . . Puss! . . . Puss!" he said holding out his hand in a rush of affection. It turned and stared at him as if in contempt. Then it arched its back and spat and leaped over a stone wall and vanished from his sight.

BRYAN MacMAHON

WEDDING EVE

**S**OFTLY: "Freda, are you awake?"  
The girl in the moonlit bed sat up gracefully. Quietly she said: "Yes, Anna, I am awake."

Her younger sister, Anna, came into the room. She had a heavy coat slung across her night-dress. Noiselessly she closed the door behind her. In midroom she stopped. Her hands were joined prayerfully in front of her. She stood there some little distance from the end of the bed. Instinctively, her fingers reached out and touched the wedding dress that was hanging on a shoulder on the great wardrobe door.

"What is it, Anna?"

"It's very quiet now, isn't it?"

Freda did not reply. Anna went to the window. She looked out to where the fall of grassy ground was. She looked at the lake and the island it contained. The moonlight had touched the castle on the island and was making a white mist on the mountains far away. Her standing there quenched a good deal of the moonlight. Over her shoulder she said: "Do you think it will be all right?"

Thoughtfully: "Yes." Suddenly: "Why do you ask?"

"This is the night to ask over and over again, 'Are you sure?'"

Freda did not reply.

Anna turned. Her fingers idled with some articles on an occasional table that lay in full moonlight. Half to herself she said: "Old, new; borrowed, blue." She lifted a trinket and dropped it heavily.

Freda said: "I have reasoned it out. Insofar as a woman is able to reason things out"—she made a noise like laughter—"what with all the tides and winds of her body and mind. One day a week ago when I was at peace I walked to the lakeside where the branches are thickest. No wind blew. There was no sound only the hollow pecking of the fish at the surface of the water. I asked myself: 'Are you sure?'" Just as you have asked me now. I answered myself: 'Yes, I am sure!'"

"Things have happened since then, Freda. Trifles, I grant you! What about now?"

"Now is not important. Of that I am certain. Now I am disoriented. Disorganised. What I reason out now is erroneous."

Sharply: "Is it because you are geared to him, Freda? Gearing is such an insidious process. A woman is open to be geared to a house, a dress, or a string of pearls. If a woman is geared to the idea of a certain house, she makes every housing

fact come congruent to that house and to none other. The whole world of her thought can revolve about its staircase." She paused. "Pity the hairdresser who is geared to hair." A longer pause. "Have you proof of his variety?"

Except for her peaceful breathing, Freda was silent.

Anna quoted: "'A strenuous virtue or a strenuous sin.'" Then, with sham eagerness, "I do not wish to say the things my tongue says. To-night my mind is a galloping horse. If I do not speak as I am now speaking every cockcrow down the years will upbraid me, saying: 'Her room was next to yours. You two had evolved a common language. You had but to step out of bed when they all had gone, slip your feet into your mules, throw your heavy green coat across your shoulders, open the door of her room, come in and whisper, "Freda, Freda, are you sure?"' Then stand in the moonlight . . . as I am standing now."

After a while, Freda said: "It's the noise he makes with his pipe when he slams it into his palm, isn't it?"

"How stupid of us! And how sensible! What dimension are we in now, sister?"

The girl in the bed laughed richly. "Such an absurdity!" she said. "There is no one else in the world to whom you could tell it. There is no one in the world with whom I could discuss it but you."

Anna said: "To-day I watched him narrowly. Such a cocksure settled gesture! First his lips tighten. He breathes ponderously through his nose. When you least expect it, he slams the pipe into his open palm, like this!" Anna slammed her right fist into the palm of her left hand. Exculpating herself, she said archly: "Remember, we both put it into words together." In a different tone: "Do you still like the old man you can see so plainly in him?"

Freda was thoughtful. Anna returned to the window. She said in a sort of low chant: "You must recall how much it cost us to crystallise it in words? The desire to be one! Always, Jim and you will be two."

"I have given the matter much thought. It is conceivable that it does not exist. We are not sure that there is such a thing as one-ness. Have you experienced it?"

"Its existence argues God. I have not experienced it. With Peter, I thought . . . But no! It has been handed down from woman to woman through all the centuries. There is no alternative to its being true. It is a common factor of womankind. It is behind all singing. It is the Clue in us. Look how it ambushes us sometimes even with an utter stranger. Quite possibly a man physically repulsive. Rarely do women express it. Times, lying awake beside snoring husbands, they stretch their hands up into the darkness in an effort to grasp this abstract something. The first woman in the world squatting on sand, sieving sand like time through her fingers and watching her husband move towards her over the sand must have puzzled prodigiously to express it. Then the other women: here and everywhere, borderless as to time and



place—each had a skin which was one of the four colours. They sat beside countless fires idling with countless pokers. I see them sitting on cliff fences on sunny days. Some reached farther than others. But always a cross has marked the limit of their thrusting. Some were left inexplicably limp. But in the end they became philosophical; they pushed their shoes before them and went forward to meet what they had to meet, saying: ‘What does it matter?’ ‘Who am I?’ ‘Let it drift!’ ‘How inadequate I am!’ and other similar verbal gestures of surrender. You and I, Freda, cannot hope to be exceptions. Pale shadows that we are, bred over-finely, educated unnecessarily, possessing leisure and a modicum of money, living as we do in this monstrous house, this . . .

“ . . . bastard castle in the most stagnant barony in Ireland.”

“Beside the lake on which lies the island on which there is a castle beyond which hang the imperturbable hills. Have we not won forward, sister, inch by inch? Have we not dispensed with several rungs of the mind’s ladder until we have become superb-leapers?” She turned. “How will you like having to ascend and descend rung by wretched rung?”

Freda asked herself: “How is that we made it go?” Then, in a low voice: “If God made us in His own image . . .”

“ . . . the virtues we possess are tiny micro- . . .”

“ . . . micro-somethings of the virtues that pre-exist in the person of God . . .”

“ . . . Who seeing, as it were, Himself, with illimitable wryness through the wrong end of his gigantic telescope . . .”

“ . . . and flinging something akin to that image to instant flesh and blood. Bidding it to exult . . .”

“ . . . finitely. To love . . .”

“ . . . finitely . . .”

“ . . . But always with the promise of the macro-somethings . . .”

“ . . . of the fruition of that laughter that as yet is but the one-millionth part of the laughter of God . . .”

“ . . . the fraction being arbitrary since the mind baulks at a smaller portion . . .”

“ . . . there being times when it seems that God makes the promise factual in our transient flesh . . .”

“ . . . when we swell and swing and sway and are exalted . . . Music . . .”

“ . . . and at the point when we dream ourselves to the very threshold of transfiguration . . .”

Anna said fiercely: “Always there is the absurdity! The incongruity! The red moustache on the guinea hen! The brown cat sleeping on the cross of stone!”

Silence.

Freda chided softly: “You broke it too soon! Just when it seemed that we had succeeded in expressing the inexpressible.”

Anna said: “Believe me, Freda, I am sorry. Please begin again.”

“It is little use. We had reached the end.”

"No! No! We can begin again . . . on a lower plane."

Freda tried: "A character we said that had streaks. Like a landscape that was worthy of being painted. Pitfalls and creeks and grassy hollows. Arid patches too. Glimpses of the river. Pegwood and the silver undersides of certain leaves."

"Love begins in the head. The body itself can only reach to thirty per cent of exultation."

Freda's effort was discernible as effort: "The question becomes heavy and hard. Sometimes it seems so easy."

Anna seemed to surrender. "Before I came in, while I was lying in the darkness, it seemed possessed of an unusual clarity."

Shrewdly, Freda said: "About Jim?" What followed came slow like a knife blade: "There are times when his open right hand claws the air. Seeking an invisible tennis racquet."

Very eagerly: "Yes!"

"Yes!" Also very eagerly. "You have noticed it! The sharpness of your yes betrays you. It has quizzed you too." In a tired voice: "Play square, Anna. You are not wholly altruistic."

"You mean . . ."

Freda stiffened: "I dare you to say I lie."

After a pause, Anna said: "You do not lie, Freda."

Freda was merciless: "The day in the island—as we rowed across—you remember how the clasps of the boatman's braces caught the sun? And when we trampled the grass where the sheep had not been, so as to spread out our Foxford rug . . ."

"Go on!"

"When you cut your hand on the rose bush and Jim bound it. The riddle was not so easy as the blood came spurting and his hands were on yours. Was it, my sister? Why do you not answer? You must recall how the simple suddenly became the complex. Then, we both saw the appalling futilities of our speaking here. As if, indeed, our united minds could cage or limn or trace or predict the mind of the meanest mortal on this earth. In all its magnificent variety! In all its astounding versatility! In all its glorious unpredictability! You saw it, Anna, didn't you? I tell you, you saw it. It lay there crystal clear between your hands and the rosehook that was coloured with your blood. Jim's handkerchief was pied with your blood. Together, as on a hand-clap, we realised our limitations and our folly."

Anna said, wearily: "It was a pity ever to destroy it, Freda. At this hour. Just before you go."

Freda continued: "You know that that is not all."

"What more?"

"You saw the gesture then, the tennis racquet gesture. You sensed the adventure that lay behind the staidness and the solidarity. Behind even the hollow sound of the pipe mouth on his palm."

Vividly, Anna said: "I saw it! Every part of me cried out for that adventure."

"And that is why you are here, Anna. To see if I had seen that you had seen the adventure."

Humbly: "That is why I am here, Freda."

The girl in the bed relaxed. She sighed and said: "Now we are at peace again."

Anna remained looking out the window. Miles away on the hills an unexpected tongue of fire leaped up. Anna started reciting in a voice reminiscent of a ribbon bobbing on a girl's pigtail:

"Fire on the mountain, run, boys, run,  
You with the red coat, follow with the drum.  
The drums shall beat, and we shall meet  
Fire on the thum thum thum thum thum . . ."

The moonlight increased in brightness until it could be fairly said to imitate the day. It had the whiteness of fresh tin. Then as she looked out on it wonderingly, Anna saw the cigarette glow by the laurels. She saw the great form stalking on the grass beside the pathway's edge. She threw open one half of the case-ment and leaned out on the sill. Her lips were apart with eagerness. The cigarette glow had turned to the noise of the opening window.

"Father!" Anna called.

Freda sprang out of bed and shrugged into a dressing-gown. She opened the other half of the window. She too leaned forward. They straightened as they awaited his approach. Through the opes of the gown and coat they were seen to be slim and virginal. Their bodies were unbroken.

Bulky as The Liberator the father came stalking across the grass. For all his weight he moved like a cat. His pyjama ends were white below the turn-ups of his trousers, and were lapping over his shoes. He was wearing the enormous dressing-gown the sisters could not procure nearer than Dublin.

A Cairn terrier waddled after him.

"Hush, blast ye for petticoats!" their father said, with shallow bluster. "D'ye want to rouse all creation?"

"You'll catch your death!"

"Haven't I a right to walk where I like and when I like? Do I ask ye what ye're doing? Do I interfere with ye when ye're at this jack-acting of dissection of motives, trends, causes and ridiculous phenomena? Answer me! Isn't someone bound to hold the physical while ye are tampering with the metaphysical?"

"Rssst! Pooka! Pooka!" Anna called to the dog. The terrier a miniature monument to resentment, was tempted to place his buttocks on the grass. He looked dismally up. He was tired of bizarre behaviour in the moonlight. Straw was warm. Grass was cold. Gravel was rough. Duty was duty. He owed women no allegiance.

The girls laughed. Freda said, provocatively: "Tomorrow father, you must look your best. When you're giving me to the man!"

"My best! Look, darlings, your dead mother—before her loveliness snared me, there was a time when I drank so much that once I saw a dairymaid hiding behind an ordinary green



apple. Four nights in succession I slept in a hollow of the sand-hills. The fifth night I straightened myself and passed gallant muster at a County Ball. A razor, a white shirt, the heels of your shoes shined, a leather bag and a constitution—they always get by.” He dragged on his cigarette. Slyly, he queried: “At it again?”

“At it again!” they agreed.

He ground the cigarette into the grass. He became theatrical. “Holy You, Utter Divine Creator of Heaven, Hell, Purgatory, Earth, Stars and Planets we know not of! Are ye never going to give it a rest?”

“It ends here, Father,” Anna said quietly.

He chose to ignore the importance of this statement. “Ah, well, where would ye be got? Yeer mother was at the same game.” Wryly, half turning away: “There isn’t much of me in ye.” He turned around fully. “Come now, admit it? Fair play is bonny play.”

“Divil a much, father,” they agreed.

He lifted his right arm to the horizontal and aimed an imaginary revolver at the shrubbery. “Bang!” he said loudly. “All my braggin’ and carousin’ and philanderin’. Bang! I never sired a son.” He stopped firing and looked up at them. “Only the pair of ye!” He hullahooded with laughter. “As if a church organ had a pair of pups and they turned out to be two small sweet fiddles.”

The young women straightened themselves at the open case-ment as they pealed laughter. Now more than ever before they were white, slim and virginal.

They became conscious of their father’s hands. The uneasiness of them. He pulled up the sleeve from his left forearm, then slapped the flesh quickly with the palm of his right hand. “Flesh!” he said, “you can’t whack it. Why did we get put into flesh,” he said, “if not to break horses, caress women and down upstarts? Three cheers for flesh!” Abruptly: “I almost forgot.”

Simultaneously he thrust his hands into the pockets of his dressing-gown. He swung both arms fully at the same time. “Catch!” he said.

The two large Jaffa oranges were lamps moving upwards through the night air. Now they were silver, now gold.

Standing quite still, Freda caught her orange and trapped it firmly against her body. Anna, over-eager, leaned forward and fumbled hers out into the air of the night. Twice her fingers dribbled it hopefully. Then the orange fell heavily to the gravel below.

“Just how you muffed Peter!” said her father. He picked up the orange. “Catch a man or an orange as Freda caught hers. By standing quite still and clutching firmly what comes to you.”

“I could have caught Peter, father,” Anna said furiously. “You at least know that.”

“You could have caught the orange, too,” he said. “Here!” He recovered the fruit and flung it up into the room. Anna re-

fused to try for it: it padded away unheeded into the recesses of the bedroom. Pouting, Anna watched the orange flame her sister was holding in her hand.

"To hell with ye!" their father shouted. "To hell with all women! Sometimes! Now, for instance. To the bright belly of hell with them to-night!" His voice was clotted with loss. As he walked away he laughed richly over his shoulder. His postscript came: "To-morrow it will be different."

Despite her anger, Anna laughed. She watched the terrier plod philosophically after the hillock that was her father.

When her sister had gone, Freda closed the casement, then set a match to the candle on the dressing table. Sitting on the mahogany stool before the mirror she began to preen and flirt and twist herself for her own delectation. Now and again she made her nostrils widen in a way she had long practised. She opened her dressing-gown and lifted her head high from her body. In the background of her reflection the candlelight barely stroked the wedding dress. Suddenly she stopped, and putting her face close against her own image, asked: "Are you sure? Are you sure?" Leaning away from the mirror, she said with vehemence: "I am certain! Absolutely certain!" Then with a shrug of her shoulders and a shrivelled laugh: "At least I think I am!"

Drawing back the left sleeve of her dressing-gown she smacked the flesh of her forearm with the open palm of her right hand. When the laughter came it was her father's, but the unpractised smack was her own. She grimaced. A gesture saved from his rakish days, she thought.

She looked around her sharply. The orange was on the dressing table. Of a sudden she snatched it up and catching it as she caught it when it had come flying in the open casement, pressed it to her, true and steady against the valley of her breasts.

## BENEDICT KIELY

### *PILGRIMS*

**B**LUE was the colour of the rosary, the colour of the Mother of God, of the hot steam screaming up from the black engine, of the sky arched over the morning town and the tiny station. Long before the train started the pilgrims were saying the rosary, a separate rosary in every carriage, blue voices swelling out, falling and rising, to the blue morning. Then with five decades finished the pilgrims rested from praying and talked about the world they lived in, about the town they were leaving and the town they were going to, about the journey before them to the holy place where the brown skull of the martyr dead for centuries was kept as a sign and a memorial in a glass box.

Listening to the talk he looked out of the window at the coloured advertisements nailed to the railings on the opposite platform. He put his hands on his bare knees, his own flesh touching his own flesh, and shuddered with self-pity at the ignominy of short pants. He remembered the greater ignominy of dry shaves. George had long trousers, good grey flannels. But then George was a man with six years experience of shaving and the brown wisdom of twenty-one in his eyes. George sat facing him, taking part in the conversation.

The advertisements slowly moved away from him. Wheels clanked, gathering speed, over the metal of a bridge. He looked down at narrow backyards and small windows with blinds still drawn. That was a protestant part of the town and protestants didn't make pilgrimages. When his ma and da reached for their rosaries a second time he made a sudden excuse-me sound that could mean only one of two things. He slipped out of the compartment into the empty swaying corridor. He watched the humpy ridges of the roofs going away from him to be swallowed up in the fields. George joined him.

George said: "They've got praying on the brain in there. They'll say the fifteen decades of the rosary. I know by the look in their eyes."

A slow river curved through the green fields. "That's what a pilgrimage is for," he said. "All praying. An excursion is all drinking and fighting."

"And a wee bit of coortin," George said. "But you wouldn't know about that."

"I heard tell of it."

"I was a year in a college," George said. "You can't tell me anything about pilgrimages."

"You know everything."



"I know that the people that go on excursions go on pilgrimages too. The only difference is they don't fight and there isn't much drink."

\* \* \* \*

Green was the colour of the fields on both sides of the railway, the colour of childhood and fun and the first kiss.

"Come up the train," said George, "they might be cardplaying somewhere."

From end to end the train was blue with the rosary. They waited in the corner of the corridor beside a lavatory and gave the people time to tire of praying. Then they slipped into a half-empty compartment and sat down side-by-side. The old lady sitting opposite them manoeuvred her newspaper with the awkwardness of one unaccustomed to reading a newspaper in a moving vehicle. It was a local newspaper with wide clumsy pages and black blotchy print. She was a small stout stump of a woman, her long black skirt billowing outwards and downwards to meet the shiny blackness of buttoned boots of patent leather, her solemn black bonnet almost sitting beside her, the ribbons dangling over the edge of the seat like two thin legs. She sighed loudly behind the newspaper. She folded the newspaper into very small folds. It crackled like a fire catching in weeds and dry sticks. Her face was fat with a hard square fatness and two black moles on one cheek were like the tops of screwnails holding the tough yellow skin in place and preserving it from wrinkles.

She sighed again and said in a loud voice: "It's a terrible thing to read a third cousin's name in the paper in connection with something as terrible as wilful murder."

She was as black as soot up the chimney, he thought, and her face was as yellow as goose grease. But inside in her mind she was meditating on murder, and red was the colour of blood and murder, and red was the colour of martyrdom, the colour of the vestments the priest wore reading the Mass in memory of a man or woman who died for the love of Christ.

The other people in the carriage sighed sympathetically. George was curious. George was always curious. Curiosity was stamped all over his thin freckled face, set his round protruding eyes shining like headlights. He leaned across the compartment and tapped the old lady on the knee. She was long past the time of life when a stranger's tap on the knee could be interpreted as anything other than courtesy. He said: "Did your third cousin murder somebody, ma'am?"

"He was murdered," she sighed. "Had his poor head battered clean off. On the threshold of his own barn."

Her face wrinkled suddenly, the yellow skin defying for a moment the tightening pressure of the moles. It might have been a grimace of great grief or mental agony. It might just as readily have been the satisfied smile of a princess among her courtiers or an actress surrounded by her admirers, of any man or woman becoming for a moment the centre of interest and attention. For everybody in the compartment had suddenly sat up to listen. The

case was all in the papers. When she spoke again it was not only to George but to her audience, to the whole world of prosaic people who had never a murdered relative.

"God rest the poor man," she said. "He was civil and innocent all the days of his life. Very unlike his half brother who two years ago had his name in the paper for something similar".

"Was he murdered as well?" asked George.

She blessed herself. She said: "God between us an' all harm, it was worse. Farandaway worse. He murdered a poor girl an' by all accounts marrying instead of murdering would have been better for both of them."

The compartment shuddered. "They were an unfortunate family," she said. "Those of you that are old enough might remember the time the servant-man murdered the three unmarried sisters."

Nobody seemed to remember it. She was queen and mistress of a horrified silence that absorbed everybody except George. "Colm here heard his grandfather talking about it," lied George, and he indicated Colm by putting his left hand on Colm's bare knee so that Colm for a moment forgot about murder and remembered the mortifying lack of long trousers.

"Well the granduncle of this poor fellow that cut the girl's throat. . . ."

"Was he the servantman that killed the three unmarried sisters?"

"No, but he found the bodies. And wasn't the murderer his best friend. They say the shock affected the poor man's mind. He ended his days by jumping into a canal in England."

George leaned back in his seat and breathed out, slowly and audibly. Brown was the colour of freckles and brown was the colour of curiosity, and even the brownest curiosity had to come sometime to the point of satisfaction and the end of curiosity. Green was the colour of the first kiss given and taken in the quiet corner of a green field, and red was the colour of a man murdering a girl that he should have married, and black was the colour of the devil and the colour of the clothes of a woman who knew too much about murder.

"May God have mercy on all their souls," said George raising his round eyes piously to the white ceiling of the compartment, and beyond the ceiling was blue sky.

"That they may get all the graces of the pilgrimage", said the woman, whipping out a rosary beads as long as a measuring tape and each individual bead the size of a marble; and before George or Colm could do anything about it the gentleness of prayer was around them as blue as the blue air, and red murder was forgotten, and high martyrdom, and green kisses; and the prayers they said were set like jewels around the mysteries of the resurrection, the ascension, the descent of the Holy Ghost, the assumption, and the crowning of the Mother of God in the blue courts of heaven.

\* \* \* \*

Grey was the colour of age, the colour of the hair of old men

and women, the colour of old streets and high tottering houses and ancient towers, the colour of history.

His mother said: "Where were you all the time boy?"

"Got stuck in the crowd far up the train, ma."

"Did you say your rosary?"

"We said several," George replied. "Isn't there a great crowd on the pilgrimage?"

Colm's mother smiled and said there was surely. She always smiled when George spoke politely to her, and George always spoke politely to elderly ladies. For some reason or other she liked George.

There was a great crowd on the pilgrimage. The people jammed the exit from the platform. The sun was shining. Outside on the roadway a brass band was playing very slowly and solemnly the tune of a hymn. Some of the pilgrims started singing the words of the hymn the band was playing. George and Colm waited cautiously on the edge of the crowd. A thin monkish man coming from behind caught George by the arm. He said: "George you're the man I want."

"Hallo Mr. Richards," George said. "Hallo Rosaleen."

Rosaleen stood at a little distance and smiled sweetly. Her father was dark-faced, bald-headed, as solemn in his black suit as the high grey houses of the ancient town, but Rosaleen was plump and pretty and yellow-haired and her little body curved attractively. George had one eye on the father and one eye on Rosaleen. Colm had one eye on Rosaleen and one eye on George. Green was the colour of the first kiss, but the colour of the second kiss and afterwards, or the colour of warm curves, might be the yellow colour of ripening corn.

"You're an educated young man, George," said Mr. Richards. He handed George a short length of red ribbon. "Tie this ribbon around your left arm an' that'll make you a steward."

George tied the ribbon around his left arm. "I'm a steward," he said. "What happens now?"

"Stand outside the station and help to direct the people to the church."

"I was never in this town in my life."

"We'll soon mend that," said Mr. Richards. He sketched with a pencil on the back of an envelope. He handed the sketch to George. "That's the town," he said.

George looked quickly at the sketch, then put it in his breast pocket with what seemed to Colm a pantomime of carefulness. In the background Rosaleen was laughing silently at the antics of George. The solemn man was looking solemnly at the struggling crowd.

He said: "Tell them to go straight down the hill, turn right over the bridge, turn left in the centre of the town, and stop at the first church on the right."

George repeated the words as if memorising them, beating time with the index finger of his right hand. George was a card. When he had repeated his instructions twice he gave a military salute



and said: "Aye, aye sir." The solemn man didn't even know that he was being fooled. Rosaleen was laughing quietly behind her father's back. Yellow and gold were the colours of her laughter and the colours of the strengthening sunshine. Colm wished to God that he could be a card like George.

\* \* \* \*

Headed by the band the pilgrims were going in a shapeless mass down the slope towards the centre of the town. Colm hesitated. "What about directing the people?" he said.

George laughed. "Would you pay any attention to that holy-mary of a man? I wouldn't mind directing his wee daughter."

"She's a nice girl."

"She's all that and something else too," George agreed. He looked sideways at Colm. He patted Colm's shoulder. "Take the advice of an older and wiser man," he said, "don't worry your head about her or the likes of her. She's bad medicine for the young."

"She's only a year older than I am myself."

George stopped to lean on the wall at the side of the road, to look down on the town, the streets and houses and factories, the great river with two steamers moored at the quayside, the grey steeples that could chime and the grey towers that were always silent.

"A girl of sixteen is a lot older than a boy of fifteen," he said. "Especially when the girl is Rosaleen and the boy has short pants."

Colm said nothing. His soul was weak with the bitter shame of those bare knees. The old suit he wore going to school had long pants, but his mother wouldn't allow him to wear his old suit on a Sunday, and his father wouldn't buy him a new Sunday suit until the one he had was worn out. For a moment walking in the blinding sun he understood the colours of murder and anger.

"What I want now," George said, "is something to eat."

They turned to the right over the bridge. The footpaths were crowded with pilgrims gulping down the air that came blowing from the sea. In the middle of the bridge a girl's voice called George. She was tall and sunburned and darkheaded and she wore a blue coat. Her voice had all the round rough friendly vowels of country places. The blue coat had about it the musky odour of turfsmoke and faintly from her clean skin Colm smelt the smell of plain unscented soap. She said: "George, it's generations since I've seen you."

George eyed her calmly. He said mechanically: "Go straight down the hill, turn right over the bridge, turn left in the centre of the town, and stop at the first church on the right."

She wasn't easy to snub. She laughed: "You're as daft as ever, George. You never come to the crossroads now."

"I'm a steward now," he said. "I haven't a minute. I'm run off my feet directing people."

A crowd of passing pilgrims swept between them. Colm saw George moving speedily across the bridge, and he followed as fast

as he could, looking back once or twice for a sight of the tall girl. But the crowd had swallowed her and her coat that was the colour of the rosary, and the colour of the sea and of the wide river flowing down to the sea. The smell of her washed skin troubled his senses, and he marvelled at the greatness of George who could afford to despise such riches.

\* \* \* \*

The big event of the day was the procession, and the procession was all the colours of the rainbow: no less than seven bands blaring golden music, the Children of Mary dressed in blue and white, the coloured banners of all the confraternities, the clothes of all the marching men and women, the white surplices of the priests and altar boys, the brown Franciscans and the white Dominicans, and always the yellow sunlight pouring out of the blue sky and brightening the walls that were grey with age.

Colm liked the procession, the slow solemn movement, the music of the bands, the wind flapping the banners, the watching crowds lining the street that led up to the church where the shrine was. He liked it because, in spite of the indecency of short pants, he walked with the men, who walked strongly and steadily and four deep. He was a man moving with the movement of a world of men, and, for a while, he forgot the girl with the blue coat and the girl with the yellow hair.

The bands stopped playing as they approached the church. The bandsmen stood in silence at the side of the street, while the procession turned to the right through wide iron gates, went up the steps and through the high doorway into the cool quiet church. The candles burning on the distant altar, an organ playing softly somewhere in the shadows, only made the quietness more quiet. The people filed into the pews, their feet bumping on the floor with something that was more a murmur than a noise. A priest stood waiting in the pulpit, as motionless as a statue, until the murmur ceased and the pews were filled. Then he blessed himself with the crucifix of his rosary beads and commenced the rosary. The voices of the pilgrims rose in the responses, swelling outwards and upwards, filling the church up to the high arched roof.

Colm and George sat side by side at the end of the seat in the aisle to the right of the pulpit. It was a pleasant place to sit. The wind blew cool in through an open doorway. You could look out through the doorway at green trees and sunshine. Colm would have looked out through the doorway all the time, but his mother was sitting two seats behind him and he could feel her eyes boring into the small of his back.

The rosary ended. The pilgrims rose from their knees and sat down in the hard seats. The priest said in a loud voice: "*The souls of the just are in the hand of God, and the torment of death shall not touch them. In the sight of the unwise they seemed to die, and their departure was taken for misery; and their going away from us for utter destruction: but they are in peace*".

George leaned towards Colm and whispered something, then rose from his seat, genuflected, and was gone through the doorway

into the sunshine.

The priest was saying: "*As gold in the furnace he hath proved them, and as a victim of a holocaust he hath received them, and in time there shall be respect had to them*".

George might be back in a minute. He might have been feeling ill. He might merely have wanted to go out. But for some reason he could not understand Colm was nervous and fidgety. He listened to the priest: "*The just shall shine, and shall run to and fro like sparks among the reeds. They shall judge nations, and rule over people, and their Lord shall reign for ever*".

The space left by George was very cold and empty. He felt it with his left hand. But he didn't risk a sideways look that his mother would consider a yielding to distraction. He kept his eyes on the priest in the pulpit. The priest said: "Words taken, my dearly beloved brethren, from the Book of Wisdom, the third chapter." Then he led the pilgrims in making the sign of the Cross. He cleared his throat, steadied himself by resting the palms of his hands on the edge of the pulpit, and was off into the sermon. He was good for an hour at least, thought Colm, looking at the size of him and listening to the sound of him; and George was gone like a spark among the reeds, out into the quiet grey town, but not like one of the just. For the just who had died for God had hardly bothered much about maidens with yellow hair, and Colm's instinct shivering on the threshold of life told him that Rosaleen was gone also like a yellow flame between the grey ancient walls. He rested his hands on his bare knees and gritted his teeth. George had known that he couldn't follow because his mother's eyes were nailing him to his place on the hard wooden seat. That thought made a red mist before his eyes, and the priest and the pulpit and the pilgrims faded away, and the words of the sermon thundered in his ears as if God was speaking to him alone.

\* \* \* \*

Afterwards, searching the town for George, the words came back to him, and fragments of the ceremony that followed the sermon. He leaned on the parapet of the big bridge, losing his own identity in the movement of the blue water going in one mass and glittering with the sun to the neighbouring sea. After the text the preacher had said: "These words apply very appropriately, dear brethren, to the martyr whose memory we celebrate today." So many centuries had turned the town grey, all the time the blue river flowing down to the blue sea, since the martyr had lived the life of a wandering hunted man. The preacher had preached about those wanderings, about the journey to Europe and the quiet years spent there in studious and cloistered preparation, about the return to Ireland in a small ship sailing precariously over stormy seas. The preacher had gone into great detail about the perils of stormy seas. Studying the smooth movement of the river Colm tried to imagine what a stormy sea really looked like: dark water rising and falling under dark skies.

The preacher had gone into greater detail about the wandering years that followed the martyr's return to Ireland: the minister of



a proscribed religion going from house to house with a price on his head, celebrating Mass in open places when the hills were white with snow. White, thought Colm, was the colour of silence and the colour of eternity. The preacher had grown red and loud with anger when he came to the capture, the betrayal by false friends, the lying charges, the execution. With his left hand Colm felt the cold empty seat where George had sat, the false friend, gone with the girl whose hair was yellow like gold, the yellow gold of the lifted monstrance, the gold of the flames of the candles burning on the altar, the golden voices of the choir singing Latin words in praise of God, chanting Latin words as the pilgrims filed one-by-one past the shrine of the martyr and out again into the golden sunshine.

\* \* \* \*

Once in the course of his search for George he saw his father and mother at a distance along a crowded street. He was hungry and he guessed they were on their way to have tea before the train left. But he stifled his hunger and avoided them, running along a sidestreet that narrowed to a lane, and along the lane until it changed into a path that went by the side of the river and away from the town. He followed the path, the gossiping water to his right and a whispering meadow to his left, until the town was far behind him, and the sunlight weakening and shadows gathering in corners of distant fields.

He found George and Rosaleen sitting on the grass by the edge of the path. George had his legs crossed like a tailor squatt-ing. He was chewing a piece of grass and saying something to Rosaleen out of the corner of his mouth. Rosaleen was combing her yellow hair, her arms raised, her mouth fenced with hairclips, her breasts and shoulders disturbed with laughter at the humour of what George was saying.

"Fancy meeting you here," George said.

"It's a free country," said Colm.

"It's all that and heaven too," George said. He stood up and stretched himself lazily. "Is the praying all over?"

"It is."

"My apologies for deserting you," George said. "But I couldn't wait to hear about the martyr's sufferings. It would have broken my heart."

Rosaleen, standing straight while George dusted fragments of grass from the back of her skirt, tinkled with merriment. George grinned. Colm smiled weakly. They walked back slowly and silently towards the town, Rosaleen walking between George and Colm, Rosaleen and George holding hands and now and again pressing against each other. The river went gossiping beside them and the whispering of the meadowgrass died into the thickening shadows.

In the crowded street near the big bridge they came so suddenly on his father and mother that he had no time to run or dodge. His mother said: "Where were you all the time, boy? We searched the town for you."

"We went walking after the devotions," George said. "Wasn't it a fine sermon?" A lie, Colm thought, never was the least trouble to lucky George.

"It was indeed," his mother said. "But you'd want to hurry to get something to eat before the train goes."

"I'm waiting for the late train," George said.

"Can't I wait too?" Colm asked.

"Indeed you can't," his mother said. "It's all very well for George. He's a grown man." And she looked at George and George looked at her and they laughed understandingly.

Walking away between his father and mother he didn't speak a word, didn't look back once over his shoulder. He knew that George and Rosaleen were going somewhere hand-in-hand and that they had already forgotten about him.

\* \* \* \*

There was no room for him in the compartment so his mother sent him up the train to find a seat for himself. From end to end the train was blue with the rosary. He stumbled along the swaying corridor, looking into compartment after compartment, seeing quiet hands holding rosary beads, quiet faces with eyes staring into infinity. Nobody noticed him, a pale face passing the glass, a small boy staggering along the corridor, weak and shivering and ready to cry with the overpowering force of his anger. The train was crowded. There was no room for him in any compartment.

He went on until a doorknob refused to turn in his hand and he knew that after that there was nothing but the engine, black steel and black coal, as black as night and the devil. Holding the doorknob in his two hands he sobbed painful dry sobs. What had the martyr suffered that was worse than this: the shame and the ignominy and the humiliation, the bullying and the betrayal. He turned back down the corridor, looking mechanically into compartment after compartment, looking suddenly into one pair of eyes that did not stare into infinity. It was the girl with the blue coat and, the sight of her renewing his agony, he fled, hiding for a while in a dimly lighted water-closet, watching his pale reflection in a dirty spotted mirror. When he opened the door and came out into the corridor she was standing patiently waiting.

"Hallo," she said, "you left George behind you."

"George left me."

The light in the corridor was blue, a lighter shade than the blue of her coat. The rocking of the train bumped them suddenly against each other. He steadied himself, his right hand on her shoulder.

"That's a way George has," she said bitterly, "leaving people behind him."

Looking over her shoulder into the darkness he knew how she had been hurt when George had snubbed her, hurt painfully somewhere behind the loud talk and the careless laughter.

"A person like George always meets his match," she said. "He won't leave the girl with the yellow hair."

They stood side by side in the corridor, looking out into the black world, spotted now and again with the light in the window

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of some farmhouse. Their shoulders touched. He pressed closer. His nose was once again troubled with the odour of skin scrubbed clean with plain unscented soap. Her left arm was around his shoulders, the way two friendly boys might walk home from school.

"Do you ride a bike?" she asked.

"I do."

"Then you should cycle out to the crossroads."

"What for?"

"We have great fun there in the evenings. Dancing to the bagpipes an' everything."

He didn't like dancing. He didn't like the bagpipes. But he knew it was the beginning of something; and sitting in loneliness and anger could only be the end of everything, sitting in loneliness and anger remembering George and yellow-haired Rosaleen walking hand-in-hand beside the smooth river, and the lovely shadowy evening going behind them, and gathering in the old streets and around the towers and spires. Remembering was death. Cycling, and dancing to bagpipes, and smelling the smell of plain soap, was life.

"I'll go out surely," he said.

Her arm tightened about his shoulders. He turned towards her and kissed her. He had to raise himself a little on tiptoes in order to reach her lips. She had to steer her own mouth carefully down to his. He had never kissed a girl before, and, anyway, the train was jolting wildly from side to side. He savoured faintly the smell and taste of the cigarettes she had been smoking.

And from end to end the train was blue with the rosary. Blue was the colour of the rosary, the colour of the Mother of God, the colour of the light in the corridor, the colour of the coat that covered the body of the laughing sunburned girl. Black was the colour of the night all around them, the colour of sweet oblivion, of mouth finding mouth in the darkness and making a beginning and an end.



## ROBERT GREACEN

### JAMES JOYCE

Let us recall that bitter, dogged Dubliner, James Joyce,  
Whose yeasty chaos travelled Europe in his aching brain.  
Trieste, Zurich, Paris, Rome and other cities  
Knew the young exile buoyed on anger and contempt  
For all that was provincial, meanly self-sufficing.  
A furnace blazed in his mind's eye perpetually  
And would not give him rest from constant labour  
Until the multi-imaged soul cascaded many thousand words  
Barbed and pristine with a febrile, love-hate energy.  
*Silence, exile, cunning*—those sharp keys he cut  
To unlock the obdurate gates to Europe,  
These keys made in his Dublin prison in friend-wasted days,  
When Ibsen, Jonson, Hauptmann floodlit each chamber of  
his mind  
And he determined not to honour those fierce claims  
Of country, family and church : *I will not serve.*  
Then think of him, half-blind and penniless in European towns  
Racked by the restive *daemon* of creativeness,  
Showing a will inflexible against the little streets  
With hatred in their piping, rabble voices,  
He ceaselessly dredging an oceanic mind for images  
To haunt our splintered century and show us to ourselves,  
Crying aloud with all the anguish of our time.

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**CORRECTION:** In the third last line of Temple Lane's poem,  
'The Picnic on The Shore,' published in *IRISH WRITING*  
*No. 9*, for 'awful' read 'artful'.

## STANISLAUS JOYCE



### THE TABLECLOTH

*From the Italian of Giovanni Pascoli.*

(Giovanni Pascoli, whom circumstances and election made the singer of country life and of simple joys and sorrows, was born in Romagna in 1855. He died in 1912. When the poet was twelve years old, his father, Ruggero Pascoli, was murdered while driving home at night. Ruggero Pascoli was steward of a large estate belonging to Prince Torlonia, the head of a very wealthy banking family in Rome. "La cavalla storna", the piebald mare, walking slowly with trailing reins, brought the body of the murdered man with a wound in his forehead back to the door of his house. In the chaise were two dolls bought for his youngest daughters, who for some superstitious reason, had tried to prevent their father from going out that morning. Neither the motive nor the murderers were ever discovered, but the rumour that gained most credence was that the crime was the work of poachers. From that tragic night the hand of fate lay heavy on the large, united, and until then fairly prosperous family. Within a year the eldest sister and the mother died of grief. A few years after them the two elder brothers died. The little substance the father had left, being badly administered by a guardian, was almost wasted, and the younger surviving children, of whom Giovanni, the poet, then twenty years of age, was the eldest, were left in poverty.

The poem "The Table-Cloth", refers to a superstition in Romagna that if the table-cloth is left on the table overnight, it brings back the ghosts of the dead. In the poem the young girl, who is struggling to keep house after the death of her parents, leaves the cloth spread purposely because she wants to see her dead again).

"Remember, child," the neighbours said,  
"Until the morning, overnight,  
Never leave the table spread  
With the table-linen white,  
But when the evening meal is over  
Fold away the table-cover,  
For the cloth brings back the dead,  
Brings back the pallid, mournful dead."

"They come in ever so wearily,  
 Drawing breath in laboured gasps,  
 And each sits where he used to be  
 And with both hands his brow he clasps.  
 Until the early morning watch  
 They sit around the whitening patch,  
 And all its silent, lampless gloom  
 In the nightly haunted room."

The girl is now a child no more;  
 She can keep house and cook and mend,  
 And keep home as it was before —  
 All her work is to this end.  
 For all the house-work she is able,  
 But never thinks to clear the table.  
 She leaves the table-cover spread  
 For the kind unhappy dead.

Through the wind and snow and rain,  
 Upon the midnight black and bleak,  
 She lets her dead come back again  
 With their breathing, light and weak,  
 To rest with forehead between both  
 Hands around the table-cloth;  
 To sit around till break of day  
 Remembering things far away.

Staring at the crumbs of bread  
 Upon the table-cloth, they stay  
 Motionless, with hanging head,  
 From evening until break of day,  
 Half-remembering past years  
 And drinking their own bitter tears.  
 Poor apparitions who forget  
 Are dear, ah! dearer, to her yet!

"... Bread! .. Yes, 'tis a broken crust  
 Of bread we ate in peacefulness ...  
 This is the checkered cloth ... You must  
 Remember how the linen-press  
 Was full. Ah! these are tear-stains .. Two  
 Tears, like those shed by you ... and you,  
 Two stains of bitter tears that spring  
 To our sad eyes in remembering.



## L. A. G. STRONG

### PADRAIC COLUM

THE work of Padraic Colum has had little critical attention, not through neglect or ignorance, but because its central quality is one with which literary criticism has little to do. Simplicity cannot be analysed. No critical instrument has been invented which will react to Colum's poetry. It withstands all conventional tests, as do Blake's *Songs of Innocence*, and such things as the epitaph found by Christopher Hassall in a West of England churchyard:—

Beneath this yew tree, shadow of a shade,  
A little crippled singing priest is laid;  
Took joy in life, of death was not afraid,  
And loved his Maker, though so strangely made.

We cannot describe such a quality; we can only recognise it. Colum shows again and again this child-like power to see straight to the soul of things, a point of which academic critics are frankly afraid, since it reduces poetry to its primal function of a communication from the heart of one human being to another's; and criticism, which is concerned with rationalising poetic experience, is seldom happy until such experience has been left behind. I do not wish to disparage academic criticism. It is, at its best, the metaphysics of the experience we derive from poetry. It enables us to correlate our poetic experiences, much as theology correlates our religious experiences. But, like theology, it grows silent in face of the experience itself. Thus the work of Padraic Colum, which presents us with poetic experience in its most innocent and naked form, embarrasses criticism. Often there are no allusions, no symbols, only the simplest images, nothing but the singing tone and the thing itself.

My young love said to me, 'My brothers won't mind.  
And my parents won't slight you for your lack of kind.'  
Then she stepped away from me, and this she did say,  
'It will not be long, love, till our wedding day.'

She stepped away from me and she moved through the fair,  
And fondly I watched her go here and go there,  
Then she went her way homeward with one star awake,  
As the swan in the evening moves over the lake.

The people were saying no two were e'er wed  
But one had a sorrow that never was said,

And I smiled as she passed with her goods and her gear,  
And that was the last that I saw of my dear.

I dreamt it last night that my young love came in,  
So softly she entered, her feet made no din;  
She came close beside me, and this she did say,  
'It will not be long, love, till our wedding day.'

From the particular, esoteric, critical point of view, there is nothing to explain. The mere existence of literary criticism presupposes a mystery, an inner ring of initiates: but anyone can understand this poem, or *The Poor Girl's Meditation*, or *A Cradle Song*. A ploughman might momentarily frown over *The Plougher*, but a word or two could remove his perplexity, and he could come to recognise an extension of his own sensibility, a heightened picture of his own experience.

Nor can another poet help. I have my own measure of—for example—*She Moved through the Fair*, from having spoken it over a hundred times on platform and stage, to audiences of every kind, including children, and seen it never fail of its effect, its instant message to the heart. I have heard many of Colum's poems spoken in many places, and always their honesty, their clear directness have reached the hearers. But of this I can give no more account than to say that Colum is a man whose native goodness and poetic innocence speak at once to all that is good and innocent in his audience: and that kind of talk embarrasses the universities.

## II

A lot has been made of the peasant quality in Colum's work, but he is not a peasant. His father was the station-master at Sandycove, near Dublin, and he went to the local national school with Paddy (Wing-Man) Kennedy, my boyhood friend, of whom I wrote in *Sea Wall* and *The Garden*. Like all good poets, he keeps an accurate memory of his childhood; and when, by a careless slip, I asked him if he remembered Mrs. Beggs, who kept the shop where we bought penny bloods and sweets, he corrected me instantly: "Miss Beggs". It was characteristic that our first contact was a letter he wrote me about one of my early verses, which contained the lines,

... No one that I love  
Is left at all in Sandycove,

saying that for him it sounded like "a great lament", as well as for me.

It is necessary, I think, to stress the question of background and inspiration. Those who most readily detect this legendary peasant quality are usually the last to know what it is in fact; the sort of well-disposed visitors who call turf peat, and find what they are looking for. Yeats, writing forty-five years ago<sup>1</sup> of

<sup>1</sup>Samhain, November 1905.

Colum's early plays, *Broken Soil* and *The Land*, contrasted him with Synge, and to a less degree with Lady Gregory, and said:—

"Mr. Colum and Mr. Boyle<sup>2</sup>, on the other hand, write of the countryman or villager of the East or centre of Ireland, who thinks in English, and the speech of their people shows the influence of the newspaper and the National Schools. The people they write of, too, are not the true folk. They are the peasant as he is being transformed by modern life, and for that very reason the man of the towns may find it easier to understand them."

And misunderstand them, I would add. Yeats goes on:—

"There is less wonder, less surprise in what he sees, but there is more of himself there, more of his vision of the world and of the problems that were troubling him."

This judgment has remained true, even in spite of the fact that the poet soon turned away from the theatre and the problems that were troubling the townsman, and directed the whole of his direct and simple power to the problems that are the same for townsman, peasant, and all classes of human being. It is his simplicity that has earned him the label peasant.

He is modest and objective. When John McCormack complained to him that *She Moved through the Fair*, which he sang to Herbert Hughes' setting, was not entirely clear to an audience, he at once made an even simpler version. The last stanza, for instance, began

"Last night in a dream my dead love came in . . ."

"John is right," he told me. "In a song, there must never be even an instant of doubt as to the meaning."

What I have said so far has been about the man, rather than about his poems: but, unorthodox though the approach may be, it has brought us to the cardinal point. Colum is a poet of the older tradition, one of those who regards communication as an imperative duty. Poets are in the first place concerned to record their vision, to catch what otherwise must fade unrecorded from human ken. Some have been content with this, and have had visions so recondite that they could do little for their readers, beyond seeing to it that their syntax was not obscure. This, Yeats confessed more than once, was often as far as he could go. Time and academic criticism have been needed to get at the poem's meaning. We can now understand Yeats' *Byzantium*, but it has been hard going. Colum is not a Yeats, in scope, curiosity, or power. He has not the quirks and twists of a Stephens. He is quite simply himself. There is no one like him. And his visions, though they go deep, are simple and direct, and enable him to pass them on simply and directly to his hearers. He is never obscure, and, though he is tolerant—and exceedingly shrewd—about obscurity in others, we can be sure that in his own work he would regard it as a fault, and scold himself for failing in courtesy towards his readers.

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<sup>2</sup>William Boyle, author of *The Building Fund*, *The Eloquent Dempsey*, and other satirical comedies.



## III

In a short article, I do not propose to concern myself with anything but Colum's poems. I am passing by the plays, accepting Colum's own unspoken verdict on them, the fact that he so soon decided to leave the stage alone. They arose from a general demand made by Yeats for all Irish men of letters to write for his theatre: and they held its stage for many performances and revivals. With the longer plays must be numbered *The Miracle of the Corn*, a one-act play published in 1907, and such charming prose pieces as *The Flute Player's Story*. Closer to our theme are *Broad-sheet Ballads*, an anthology published by Maunsell of Dublin in 1911 and never reprinted; and the best anthology of Irish verse it has ever been my good luck to see, published in New York by Boni and Liveright in 1922, and, for some dark reason, not seen on this side of the Atlantic.

In the introduction to this anthology, Colum showed the critical insight that has always been a part of his simplicity; the original vision reinforced by an adult shrewdness; a formidable conjunction. After saying that his aim had been a selection that would be representative of the Irish people rather than of individual poets, he made a statement that cannot be repeated often enough to Anglo-Saxon readers:—

"Ireland is a country that has two literatures—one a literature in Irish—Gaelic literature—that has been cultivated continuously since the eighth century, and the other a literature in English—Anglo-Irish literature—that took its rise in the eighteenth century."

From the origins of this later literature in Sheridan and Goldsmith he passes to Tom Moore, to whom he pays a discerning tribute. Those who rail at Moore for Anglicising—and feminising—his Irish originals, often forget that he was in fact, like his poem on *Avoca*, the meeting-place of the two streams.

"Again and again the distinctive rhythms of the music forced a distinctive rhythm upon his verse. Through using the mould of the music, Moore, without being conscious of what he was doing, reproduced again and again the rhythm, and sometimes the structure of Gaelic verse. When Edgar Allen Poe read . . . *At the Mid-hour of Night*, he perceived a distinctive metrical achievement . . ."

Colum then quotes the opening stanza of *Silent, O Moyle* . . .

"Here is the Gaelic structure with the correspondence all on a single sound—in this case the vowel 'O'—'Moyle', 'roar', 'repose', 'lonely', 'woes', with the alliterations 'break', 'breezes', 'tells', 'tale', 'murmuring', 'mournfully'."

This is interesting in itself, and crucial, for Colum's own poetry is just such a meeting place. He has never (consciously or unconsciously?) analysed his own work so clearly as in this introduction to the poetry of his country. And, in the last section, we find the final touch.

"One of the characteristics of Irish poetry according to Thomas MacDonagh is a certain naiveté. 'An Irish poet,' he says 'if he be individual, if he be original, if he be national, speaks, almost

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stammers, in one of the two fresh languages of this country; in Irish (modern Irish, newly schooled by Europe), or in Anglo-Irish, English as we speak it in Ireland . . . such an Irish poet can still express himself in the simplest terms of life and of the common furniture of life.”

Simplest terms, common furniture: he might have been speaking of Colum.

Oh, to have a little house!  
To own the hearth and stool and all!  
The heaped-up sods before the fire,  
The pile of turf against the wall!

To have a clock with weights and chains  
And pendulum swinging up and down,  
A dresser filled with shining delft,  
Speckled and white and blue and brown!

I could be busy all the day  
Cleaning and sweeping hearth and floor,  
And fixing in their shelf again  
My white and blue and speckled store!

Forgive me if I have seemed to take ‘furniture’ too literally. Colum’s work is so soundly based on essentials that to take him literally can never parody his words or his meaning.

### IV

We think of him as a poet of Ireland, and rightly: but he has lived for a long time in America, and by no means all his verse is Irish in inspiration. There are poems with exotic titles: *In the Carolina Woods*, *Hawaii*, *Condors*, *The Resplendent Quetzal-bird*. In this, the first stanza of *Monkeys*, he need not have left Dublin:

Two little creatures  
With faces the size of  
A pair of pennies  
Are clasping each other.  
“Ah, do not leave me,”  
One says to the other,  
In the high monkey—  
Cage in the beast-shop.

*Humming-Bird*, on the other hand, belongs to another climate, with *Snake*, *Vultures*, *Bison*, and *Bird of Paradise*.

Up from the navel of the world  
Where Cuzco has her founts of fire,  
The passer of the gulf he comes.

He lives in air, a bird of fire,  
Charted by flowers, still he comes  
Through spaces that are half the world.

With glows of suns and seas he comes;  
 A life within our shadowed world  
 That's bloom, and gem, and kiss of fire!

How different are this, and *Snake*, from D. H. Lawrence's *Humming-Bird* and *Snake*, both of which shudder with latent terror and sense of evil. This primal innocence has followed Colum however far he strayed. It is in his Welsh re-creations, in his Arab Songs; it goes with him to Paris, it shines in his *Verses for Alfeo Faggi's Stations of the Cross*; it clarifies his laments for Roger Casement and Arthur Griffith. It is, if Thomas MacDonagh was right, a part of the Ireland that has always remained his source and his home. I was at A.E.'s one evening when James Stephens, arriving triumphant after two years' exile in England, brought with him his friend Padraic Colum, who had been far longer in America. They were irrepressible. They bubbled with joy, like schoolboys home for the holidays; and when I read

Green, greener grows the foreland  
 Across the slate-dark sea,  
 And I'll see the faces, places  
 That have been dreams to me!

I thought that no poet had more directly put his life into his verse or his verse into his life.

"He is still interested," (wrote Yeats in 1905) "in the reform of society, but that will pass, for at thirty every writer, who is anything of an artist, comes to understand that all a work of art can do is show one the reality that is within our minds, and the reality that our eyes look on. He is the youngest of us all by many years, and we are all proud to foresee his future."

The pride has been realised, but even today it is still partly inarticulate; and I doubt if criticism will have much more to say than that of all the Irish poets of this century Padraic Colum is the most lovable, and the best loved.



## GERARD M. DEGIDON

### JOSEPH CAMPBELL: RECOLLECTIONS

SOMEHOW now that Joseph Campbell has gone to an *Tir na nOg* it seems he is here with us in far greater reality than when he actually knocked on the door and said "an bhuil tu ann, bhean a tighe?" It is the way of greatness to be fully recognized and appreciated when "the maker of words has gone"! Joseph, like many people of genius, was such a simple, kindly man. In the years when I had the good fortune to be associated with him, in our many joint concerts and on the radio, I found him a warm and affectionate friend.

On his many visits to our home he was always the same courteous, gentle poet with an infectious, rumbling laugh that shook his huge frame. He loved good food and he loved good stories. It is a pleasure to remember the many times we sat listening to his deep, sonorous voice reading some of his own poems, from his *Mountain Singer* or from *Irishry*. No wonder he was internationally famed as a poet of deep thought and powerful rhythm!

The first time I met Joseph Campbell was at Hanratty's Hotel in Limerick. That was in 1924. We were working hard for the election of Thaig O'Crowley to the Dail. It was an unsuccessful campaign. Joseph spoke at many of the meetings. Through all the years in the fight for Irish freedom he was one of those on whom the country could rely as an unselfish, untiring patriot. The man was too decent to allow any personal ambitions even in the smallest way to interfere with the great ideal of his life, "a free Ireland". Like many another fine rebel, he spent a long wearying but determined period in that monument to British tolerance and democracy, Mountjoy prison. On one occasion in Mountjoy there was quite a problem. Many of the prisoners were mere boys of thirteen or fourteen years of age—for the sceptics that is a recorded fact. Naturally, being so young, they were not as amenable to discipline as their older fellow patriots. The prisoners had their own "governing committees". They determined to make the boys obey the rules as laid down by themselves. Joseph Campbell took it upon himself to represent the boys and argued so vehemently and in such human terms for the lads that the disciplinary measures were considerably lessened and as a result Joseph became a hero, amongst so many heroes, to the young rebels. One very human little story Joseph told me many years ago was about his youngest son, "Flan". "He is our war baby, born while I was in jail!" Another story was told me by a mutual friend, Helen Crowe. She visited Joseph's home at the foot of the Sugar Loaf Mountain in Wicklow. "The half-door was open and sitting at a

blazing turf fire were four blonde-haired "boys" and a white-haired old gentleman!" The blonde-haired "boys" were Joe's three sons and his wife.

Joseph was born in Belfast in the year 1879. Literature and the arts seemed to be part and parcel of the family's everyday life. His father was an engineer who died when the children were still young. He left considerable means. The family got the benefit of excellent educations and guidance. Two in particular showed early signs of genius: John, who became a distinguished artist, and Joseph, as we know, one of Ireland's great poets. They were both members of the Ulster Arts Club. Very few people are aware of the fact that Joseph also had amazing talent as an artist. Some of his early books of poems were illustrated by himself. Unfortunately they have been out of print for many years. As a young man he was an intimate of Herbert Hughes and of Padraic Colum. With Colum he wandered through the beautiful glens of Antrim and through the mist shrouded mountains and valleys of Donegal. These lovely counties have been the inspiration for many of Joseph's poems. Several of them have been set to music by his friend Hughes, three to Donegal airs: *Slow by the Shadows*; *The Little Rose of Gartan* and the lamentingly beautiful *Gartan Mother's Lullaby*.

Joseph Campbell came to America on two occasions, the first time, in 1913, with "The Ulster Theatre Players". His sister Josephine, who became the wife of Sam Waddell, better known as Rutherford Mayne, author of *Red Turf*, was a member of the company. So was his brother John. Another of the players, who has earned an enviable reputation for himself on the American stage, was Whitford Kane. At the end of their tour Joseph returned to Ireland and to his poetry. Then for a time he lived in London. There he became secretary of the "Gaelic Society" and was a familiar figure on the streets of the English metropolis in his Celtic kilts. Again he returned to Ireland to plunge into the fight for the freedom of his beloved Caitlin ni Ullachain and her four green fields.

It would seem to me that when Joseph Campbell came to America for the second time in the Spring of 1925, he came because of his disappointment in the outcome of the Irish question rather from a desire to pursue his career in this country. But come he did and he wasted hardly a moment in his intention to spread the culture of the Ireland that he knew and loved. He founded "The School of Irish Studies". For a long time the school occupied the top floor of a building at 6 East 12th Street, a long room wherein seats were arranged to accommodate an audience of about one hundred. A small improvised stage with dressing rooms behind the back-drop curtains or in the small room off stage, which was in turn the bedroom, office and reception of the beloved poet impresario. There he worked hard and so often with such disappointing results. He presented such plays as *The Rising of the Moon* by Lady Gregory; *Caitlin ni Ullachain* by W. B. Yeats; *The Yellow Bittern* by Daniel Corkery; *Red Turf* by Rutherford

Mayne, and plays written by himself and Padraic Colum. Distinguished artists came there and lectured on the Irish drama, literature and the folklore of the Gael. There were magnificent concerts of Irish music. Jane Kavanaugh gave us many a delightful evening with her piano recitals. Joseph recited. I sang in our native Gaelic and many of the songs were written by Joseph himself. The evenings were unique in their atmosphere. They were so informal, so friendly, and over and around everything hovered the magnetic personality of the white-haired director. I remember vividly an old gentleman who came to the "School" when he visited New York from his job as a railroad worker near Boston. His name was Mr. Burns. One of his arms was gone because of an accident. But with his one remaining hand he was writing a history of Ireland. He was known to librarians here, there and everywhere in his perseverance to collect historical items regarding the land of his birth. His pockets fairly bulged with notes. He was in his seventies, from Dublin and long since gone to an *Tír na nÓg*. At the "School" he was a very special guest. He always made the "tea" at the intimate talking sessions when the classes or the play was over. He would look around the room. "Well! There's Mr. Campbell, Miss Dealy, Mr. Sullivan, Mr. O'Scannlain, Miss Curran, Mr. Kincade, Mr. Smiley and so and so!" For each one he would carefully put a pinch of tea in the pot; then he'd add one extra pinch. "Who's that for, Mr. Burns?" we'd ask. "Ah! wisha! You'd never know who's coming over the hill," he'd say. That was the friendly atmosphere of the "School".

In 1927 Fordham University became interested in establishing classes in Irish literature. What was more natural than that the professorship should be offered to Joseph? These classes were attended by many Fordham students and others interested in Irish culture. They were a recognised part of the Fordham curriculum. The classes were usually held at the University annex in the Woolworth Building, room 750.

Despite the fact that he was now a busy man, Joseph still continued to present plays, concerts and lectures. He had moved from his old headquarters in East 12th Street to an apartment at 411 West 115th Street. One night he gave a reception for the Abbey Players, then enjoying one of their most successful seasons on Broadway. The talent that was there that night! Sara Algood, Maire O'Neill, the magnificent Barry Fitzgerald, the one and only Arthur Sinclair and all the other distinguished members of one of the finest company of actors ever to appear before the public.

Shortly thereafter Joseph moved to 310 Riverside Drive, then known as "The Roerich Museum". He established "The Irish Foundation" as an affiliate of the Museum. Until he returned to Ireland in 1939 he lived there. The facilities for concerts and lectures were excellent. In Hall 21, where Joseph usually made his presentations, the walls were filled with the colourful oriental pictures painted by Roerich himself during the many years he lived in the East. To give my readers an idea of the variety and cultural



advantages of Joseph's work, here is a program that comes to my hand dated April 30th, 1932.

"Professor Roger S. Loomis (Columbia University), 'Ireland and the Legend of the Holy Grail'.

Gerard Michael Degidon, Irish Songs, 'Symposium of the Irish Theatre'.

Ernest Boyd, 'The Trend of the Modern Irish Theatre'.

James E. Flynn, 'The Moon and the Yellow River'.

Dr. James H. Cousins, 'A word for Heroic Drama'."

During this period Joseph plunged into a most auspicious venture, the publication of a magazine which he called "The Irish Review". I have before me the first "advance" copy of this short-lived monthly. Everything about the idea was fine. It was to be a medium of all the many facets of Irish opinion. Articles on literary subjects: the political situation, past and present, the Irish Drama in Ireland and America and many other interesting features. A list of the original contributors will tell you fully the diversified composition of the Magazine:—

Cornelius Wegandt, Professor of English Literature at the University of Pennsylvania.

Horace Reynolds, Lecturer at Brown University, Providence, R. I., and Havard. (His introductions to Yeats' "Letters to the New Ireland" and Gogarty's collected poems are scholarly works).

Major Eugene F. Kinkead, Chairman of the Colonial Trust Company of New York.

Sean O Cuiv, a veteran worker in the Irish language movement. He was then director of the Bureau of Information in the Irish Government.

Aodh de Blacam, an Ulsterman of Norman lineage, author of "Gaelic Literature Surveyed".

"Carbery", the pen name of P. D. McLigan, raciest of Irish sport writers.

Riobard O Farachain, one of the new school of native writers.

Cathleen Barrett, member of a Co. Waterford family and wife of the distinguished actor, Clement O'Loghlen.

Mary McGrath and Beatrice L. Walton, brilliant students of the School of Irish Studies.

There were beautiful etchings by the magnificent artist, John McA. Smiley, and by R. Lilley, both from Belfast.

The whole thought behind "The Irish Review" was that of a man of vision and culture.

Joseph had a deep abiding love for Saint Brigid. He wrote a magnificent story of her life. He read it to my wife and myself one evening, but unfortunately it has never been published. So deeply impressed was Joseph by the life of Saint Brigid that he established in 1929 "The Companions of Brigid."

One of the last formal programmes we gave together was at the Great Northern Hotel on May 1st, 1938. We called it Feis Oidhe Bhealtaine, a May Night Festival. With us was Lily Meagher, distinguished soprano, and the magnificent pianist, Carolyn Gray. On Easter Sunday night 1939 we presented a

## IRISH WRITING

memorial programme over station WEVD. We also made recordings for the musical historical library of Columbia University.

The last letter I had from Joseph in America said, "I am returning to Ireland, Gerry, and a farewell party is being given to me by Mrs. Maread McCartney and her cousin, Matt Finnegan. I want very particularly that Maire and yourself be there." That was in July 1939. We went to the farewell party for Joseph, and a few days later we said goodbye to Joseph on board ship at the foot of 16th Street, a slow travelling boat because he liked the sea. As the fussy little tugs pulled the boat into the Hudson he stood on deck, his white hair blown this way and that by a hot wind. Beannact liv, he shouted; goodbye; goodbye; and that was the last we heard of that deep, wonderful voice. Goodbye Joseph!

## BOOK REVIEWS

### JOYCE RE-APPROACHED

THE SACRED RIVER: An Approach to James Joyce, By L. A. G. STRONG. (Methuen, 10/6).

In Ireland, a country traditionally occupied with religious practices, it has long been a complaint that the Bible is not read; there is some danger that Joyce himself may be lost behind the growing army of his apologists, exponents and commentators—not to mention the smaller but no less noisy detachment of enemies who believe that our author spent what must have been a very uncomfortable life-time investing the immemorial preoccupations of the *cloaca* with literary obscurities. One frowns a bit, then, at the arrival of still another treatise but the frown does not last long as one becomes immersed in the genial mood in which Mr. Strong has written this book.

The book is—for the uninitiated to whom it is apparently addressed—obscurely named, and the subtitle is misleading. Mr. Strong largely ignores *Dubliners* and the *Portrait*, makes very skimpy use of the vast material of *Ulysses*, and concentrates on certain aspects of *Finnegans Wake*. This imbalance will surely give a wrong impression to anybody in need of “an approach” to Joyce, engendering dismay rather than encouragement; the more mature reader, however, will not be troubled.

I think Mr. Strong makes far too much—à la the alien commentators—of Joyce's interest in the pseudo-science formulated by Freud and Adler, also of his attempts as a literary technician to put language to new uses: such a man as Joyce will inevitably have his Stuart Gilberts with the purely clinical approach but in a native commentator one would look for more acknowledgement and appreciation of “the thing we keep at home”—the intimacy of Joyce's reportage and, above all, his gigantic status as the comic of the age. These things are simply not accessible to foreigners. Indeed many of them would be inaccessible to many Irish non-Dubliners. Mr. Strong also does not seem to realise that the master was not above pulling the legs of his most ardent admirers. For example, Mr. Gorman's *Life*, solemnly read and “authorised” by Joyce, contains many a statement that must have made Joyce laugh loud and long. Wisely, however, he did not object to the organisation of a Joyce mythology and to the latter one accepts Mr. Strong's book as an acceptable contribution.

I think Mr. Strong goes rather astray in examining the nature of the impact of Joyce's interest in music on his literary methods. His personal musical interest was the human voice, the simple and lyric thing, whereas his literary devices were uniformly polyphonic, with something amounting to an obsession with the dramatic effect of the discord. The lingual instrumentation of *Finnegans Wake* is exclusively contrapuntal—should one call it contra-pun-tal, the humble pun used to liberate the under side of the human mind?



I am certain Mr. Strong is genuinely far astray when he credits Joyce with "erudition." Joyce shared with jackdaws the talent of picking such bright things as suited his purpose while ignoring immensely more important things. He displays small Latin and less Greek *passim*, his attempts at reproducing elementary Irish phrases (even as to ascertainable spelling) are painful while, on the other hand, there is nothing wonderful about a man who spent his adult life on the Continent being exact in French, German and Italian. It is evident that he knew next to nothing about philosophers, not even his beloved Aquinas. As a man who was undoubtedly high-minded, he shows exceptional lack of moral judgment in imagining that his salacities, many of them intrusive, are therapeutic. Most of the commentators seem to share this notion. The sad thing about the situation is that it has repelled so many people in this country who would, had there been more moderation, have given Joyce's immense genius recognition at home where (as was shown in a long and penetrating article on *Finegans Wake* in the *Irish Times* in 1947—not noticed at all by Mr. Strong) he was almost mortally concerned to have it.

Perhaps however the fairest thing to say about Mr. Strong's book is that parts of it will provoke thought and controversy and that he has put on record many ideas, long over-due in the manuals prepared overseas, in defence of Joyce's perverse but to us understandable integrity as an Irish Catholic. If one may close with mention of a pervasive fault in *The Sacred River*, it is the abiding tone of solemnity and seriousness in discussing a man who realised so magnificently that the comic is the antidote to the tragic. Mr. Strong cracks only one joke, and it appears to be unconscious.\* Otherwise this book, which is very handsomely presented by the publishers and at a reasonable price, is an ideal substitute for the overlooked Christmas present.

MYLES na gCOPALEEN.

\*Page 130: "Some symbols resemble visually what they stand for, e.g., phallic symbols."

### HOODED HAWK

YEATS: THE MAN AND THE MASKS, BY RICHARD ELLMANN. (Macmillan, 21/-).

"Autobiography did not come easy to a man who had grown to literary maturity with Villiers de l'Isle Adam's epigram ringing in his ears: *As for living, our servants will do that for us*. He struggled into it against the grain, because he hoped it would be possible to guess the centuries in which he lived; but this sense of an ulterior responsibility drove him to seek always for patterns and pictures, and to hack and hew at his life until it reached the parabolical meaningfulness he found necessary. He must speak for his generation as well as for himself, and reveal the truth about both."

Mr. Ellmann has produced another fascinating book on Yeats; but I have little hesitation in saying that while nothing could exceed my admiration for work sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation

—there is in this book a distinct undertone of the classical psychoanalytical method which we might pass if it applied to some genial uninhibited pagan of the European Continent—but when it comes to W. B. Yeats—No.

Yeats was a reaction undoubtedly; but it was against his father's anti-religious mind—he was a reaction against everything for which that earnest worker and materialist stood. However, if the father was unswayed by the lilies and languors which were the *dernier cri* in London of the nineties, he nevertheless got his fortune told on the cards every day of the week by the little girl who kept his studio tidy. And incidentally, that remarkable man has not yet had sufficient credit done him. Here surely are fresh fields for the Rockefeller Institute.

But now for the poet: "Conscience at peace yet vigilant; spiritual and sensual desires at one; all of them in intense movement." Elsewhere Mr. Ellmann has defined personality as "the whole man, the great totality, an army not a guerilla force." Whether or not a work of art is valuable depends on whether the artist's personality is fully engaged in it.

And yet, though these definitions justify the label of "psychological theory of value," we grow conscious on reading them over, that the net does not quite hold the poet.

That is the full extent of my criticism of Mr. Ellmann's book. Not only does the net not quite hold him; it does not hold him at all.

I seem to remember a semi-biblical story written by the young W.B., in which he said that he was covered with shame when he found out how calves were born. "It had always seemed to me that they were brought from Heaven in a sort of cloud." Anyone who attempts to build up an inner history on the basis of the stories that hard-headed country lads like Yeats probably related, is bound to go wrong. Mind you, I am not denying Mr. Ellmann's *expertise* and his evident scholarship.

Now for a much tougher problem. Long before Yeats died, I had the honour of reviewing *A Vision* for a needless-to-say defunct Irish Paper "Ireland To-Day". My main difficulty in this task was to sort out Yeats's choice of symbols. May I repeat this? Because it is the clue to our greatest poet. When Yeats spoke of the Great Wheel, he was, for example, speaking the language of an alchemist of the 15th century. In other words, it is desirable to be fluent in all modes of thought, for Yeats could never be pinned down to one. When he put a conversation into the mouths of "certain shrill market-men in Byzantium of the 4th century", I had great pleasure in dealing with these arguments from the original point of view. For example, I pointed out that a certain Nicomedia, bishop of Emessus, had been warned that death could not repeat itself and that consequently Christianity could have no truck with metempsychosis. It is refreshing to realise that in a living faith provisions have been made for the Yeatsian *Anschaung*. There was also that little matter of the Guardian Angel who was jealous of his ward—if I may use the term. This, you see, was graven on

the heart of W. B. Yeats. Springing, as he did, from planters' stock, he yet perceived that no literature was possible that had not its deep and living root among the people.

He could not bring it upon himself to become a Catholic: one has to understand the Irish situation for that to be quite clear. But he could and would and did establish his own atmosphere around himself, and, this is the part that I wish particularly to emphasise—that his creation, his myths, and even, in later life, his ribaldry, have nothing to do with Oedipus Complex or an inhibited youth. The main fault in the book under review is that it seeks to explain too much by too little. I intend however to encourage such ventures of the Rockefeller Institute for the plain reason that we have not one tenth of sufficient research work in this country. What about Moore? What about Darley?

The book, produced by Macmillan, with a frontispiece of Augustus John's portrait of W. B. Yeats, is definitely a *must* for lovers of Ireland's greatest poet.

CECIL FFRENCH SALKELD.

### A NIMBLE EXPLORER

COLLECTED POEMS, 1925-1948, BY LOUIS MACNEICE. (*Faber and Faber, Ltd.*, 12/6).

The search for values in our time, 'half-blind questions that still lack their answers,' finds us in the wrong mood for poetry. We are restless between a dread of propaganda and a fear of ourselves with a result that much of our poetry is self-conscious and all of it is underplayed. In his search for an audience the poet has to risk being too self-conscious or too flat-footed. We do not deny him the right to explore his experience but we are inclined to reserve our response, except when we can term his work pretentiously difficult or doggerel nonsense. We glance at contemporary verse satisfied that 'Pindar is dead and that's no matter'.

The issue of a collected edition of poems written over the last quarter of a century is a challenge to that mood. It is disturbing to find that poems written in the middle 'twenties can be of interest still, and that easy epithets will not rid us of them. That 'Autumn Journal' was not only a chronicle of 1938 but a delicately balanced poem is much more disturbing. We might have granted the possibility of a lyric surviving. That a long narrative poem of the 'twilight war' should now have a stinging reality calls for a revaluation if not of all contemporary verse then at least of Mr. MacNeice's work.

Re-reading these poems I was struck by a deceptive facility of language and technique, an underplayed cynicism delightful at times, but most by the revaluation of a personality. It was easy to note the other traits in the various books of verse Mr. MacNeice has issued since 1929; the consistent, relentless exploring of himself was not so evident until these collected poems. His is an attractive pose, searching the gestures of life for an idea and then as it were



overlooking it. To him poetry is the exploration, not the experience. It is life neither recollected nor tranquil. It is as he himself would have it "able-bodied, fond of talking". It is, if you will, journalism with the poetry in quotes but the poetry is unmistakably there.

Many years ago Mr. MacNeice seemed to feel exiled from his fellowcountrymen:

I was the rector's son, born to the anglican order,  
Banned for ever from the candles of the Irish poor.

Whatever its cause, his exile is obvious. It haunts him, tempting him into sentimentality and superficiality. But he does not in fact realize his exile:

Though still her name keeps ringing like a bell  
In an under-water belfry.

Each in his different way the major contemporary poets have had to rid themselves of the previous generation. And each searching for perspective has sought a foothold in a remoter past. In Mr. MacNeice's verse Homer and Horace move easily with the cigarette and ice-cream:

And Aristotle was right to posit the Alter Ego  
But wrong to make it only a half-way house.

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We may search these poems in vain for large developments of technique or belief. There is a maturing and a fulfilment of the early poems, but the questions still lack their answers, 'which lack grows no less as I grow older'. Questions often answer themselves. When they do not they may be unreal. Whatever view we hold need not affect our enjoyment of these poems, which are always questioning, always joyful though not necessarily always happy.

We can find form, our lives transcended  
While and because we live.

P. J. MADDEN.

THE PICK OF TODAY'S SHORT STORIES, Edited by JOHN PUDNEY. (*Odhams Press Ltd.*, 8/6).

This volume, on an average level of achievement, is an excellent collection. It is also, however, an unadventurous collection. To the best of my knowledge, every author here represented was well-known before the war; it should be remembered that the stranglehold of the "magazine story" was loosened, if not broken, by the little magazines which flourished precariously in the hazards of wartime publishing, that new, significant writers emerged, who made no compromise with their artistic consciences; but you won't find them here. Reginald Moore is represented, but not the young writers he encouraged in "Modern Reading." However it must be admitted that John Pudney in his introduction has anticipated this objection: "ommissions, for which no apology is ever justification, are broadly based upon my own taste, upon the availability of work by established writers, upon chance and upon my ignorance of the promise of the next generation whose work, it is hoped, will find a place in subsequent editions of this series": this last statement, at least, is encouraging news.

It will be noted that I was careful to specify the "average level"; two stories included cast a curious light on the editor's standard of taste—"Mrs. Briggs", a facetious trifle by Michael Harrison, and "Birds" by Henry Treece, the type of improbable prolixity we have all written in our schooldays and lived to be ashamed of. But the remainder of the collection is the shrewd craftsmanship of mature writers. The old masters, H. E. Bates and A. E. Coppard, contribute delightfully human and technically perfect stories. Elizabeth Bowen is represented by one of her best, "The Needlecase", a whole world of compassion and understanding compressed into a few pages. Frank O'Connor and Sean O'Faolain have two stories of childhood in Cork, remembered with joy in one case, with regret in the other; both have the ring of true coin.

It is interesting to note that the contributions by novelists—Arthur Calder-Marshall, Joyce Cary, Graham Greene, Evelyn Waugh—are faintly unsatisfactory, again proving that the short-story is a craft on its own, not merely a poor-relation of the novel, or the pastime of an idle hour. The rambling, old-fashioned introduction of Graham Greene's "The Hint of an Explanation" is a

good example, contrasting utterly with the immediate grip of the born short-story writer, such as Tom Hopkinson in his bizarre slice of life, "How we bought the 'Lord Angus'." The novelist leaves one with the feeling that their stories are merely the germ of a novel, something to be worked over at a later date. But there are more genuine short-stories here—the curious poetic dialect of James Hanley's "Fancy Free", V. S. Pritchett's satiric episode "Double Divan", Gerald Kersh's little shocker "Some Other Star", "The Ploughing Match" by Fred Urquhart, and others; and before I finish, I should mention one of the best stories in the book—"The Prisoner", by Elizabeth Berridge, which I will gladly read again and again.

MAURICE KENNEDY.

THE GOLDEN EYE, BY OLIVIA ROBERTSON. (*Peter Davies*, 9/6).  
IT'S SAFE IN ENGLAND. BY KEVIN FITZGERALD. (*Heinemann*, 8/6).

*The Golden Eye* is a queer book. Olivia Robertson has a very original mind—and we have much sparkling conversation, much rapid, quaint, often profound, speculation. But I wish the story were not so inconsequent—indeed, it is not a story at all. Although some of the characters taken separately are well drawn, the whole caste in that environment are unconvincing. We know Ireland is a democracy—but the social classes still exist. In Miss Robertson's book there is no distinction. Here buyers and sellers, rich and poor meet and talk and drink tea together; there is no difference between them. Except that some individuals talk more high-brow than the others. And Eva, I'm afraid, has a cool contempt for all. It is a lonely kind of a book: each character in it grows singly like a flower. We do not see them reacting upon each other—even changing each other.

The illustrations, by the author, are charming. She has a nice collection of Dublin Street Songs. The title of the book is taken from one of these. Although Eva Tracey and Corky both derive their names from Children's Street Songs, they are not made to exist for us in cloud-cuckoo-land. Youth is at the helm, one feels. That is pleasant. But *Where are we?* is the cry. For all its brilliant conversation, I find the book completely unreal. Perhaps Miss Robertson must learn to be less clever.

In February 1827 De Quincey published his famous essay "On Murder Considered As One Of The Fine Arts". "People," he remarks, "begin to see that something more goes to the composition of a fine murder than two blockheads to kill and be killed, a knife, a purse, and a dark lane. Design, gentlemen, grouping, light and shade, poetry, sentiment, are now deemed indispensable to attempts of this nature."

In *It's Safe In England*, Mr. FitzGerald does not fall short of his great precursor's ideal. The brief Prologue to his story is a poem—indelibly imagist. One is led on from frosty brightness to the dark workings of evil.

The reading of this lively book is something of an athletic



adventure: death . . . suspense . . . more deaths . . . hairsbreadth escapes. There is little time to stand and stare. One fantastic character is plainly defined as the hero type. The criminals are somewhat shadowy—turning up inevitably, unaccountably, like figures in a nightmare.

The story is full of movement—wave upon wave—as a tumultuous sea. Suspense keeps the nerves taut. Mystery engages the curious mind. Psychology would spoil the fun.

We are not left with the impression that murder pays—which is all to the good. "For," as De Quincey argues, quite in the modern spirit, "if once a man indulges himself in murder, very soon he comes to think little of robbing, and from robbing he comes next to Sabbath-breaking, and from that to incivility and procrastination."

BLANAID SALKELD.

THE DOCTOR'S LADY, BY KATHLEEN FOYLE. (*Peter Davies*, 8/6).

THE HOUSE AT BALLYSLANE, BY C. E. R. SINCLAIR. (*H. F. and G. Witherby Ltd.*, 8/6).

Life in the little Ulster village of Augherim is quiet and humdrum, until a startling rumour arrives from the Far East: the village doctor, David Laird, on a tour for his health, has taken unto his bosom a Chinese wife, as heathen a woman as a man could hope to meet no matter how far afield he wandered.

The effect of this piece of news on the various characters of the village—the *locum tenens* who is in love with the girl the village had decided Doctor Laird would marry, the pretty young lady herself, the quaint Misses Trimble—provides ample material for an engaging and well-written comedy of Irish life.

This is, I think, a first novel; it is a most efficiently written one, anyway. The dialogue is bright and sharp, the characters credible and well-defined. It is very light of course, but for those who like their love-stories to be enlivened by down-to-earth humour, *The Doctor's Lady* is an ideal choice.

If there is one criticism that may be made, it is that the doctor hero arrives far too late on the scene, bringing with him his mysterious 'Chinese wife'. But in spite of this, the mystery is solved, and the doctor and his young village sweetheart settle down to live happily ever after. A very readable and enjoyable first novel.

C.E.R. Sinclair has written a novel of adventure, romance, and humour, which, like *The Doctor's Lady*, makes ideal wet weekend reading. When John Carpenter Forde arrives at Ballyshane, he finds something of a mystery surrounding the Tower House. Pretty Eileen O'Hanlon enlists his aid, and from then on he finds himself in one unusual situation after another.

This story is extremely light, and the mildly stage-Irish characters irritate now and again. But on the whole it is readable and entertaining, faintly reminiscent of Maurice Walshe in its outdoor and sporting scenes.


J.E.



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COCONUT ISLAND, BY ROBERT GIBBINGS. (*Dent*, 8/6).

STRANGERS AT THE FAIR, BY PATRICIA LYNCH. (*Penguin Books*, 1/6).

There is none to excell either of these authors in each one's own field. But what a contrast they provide! Mr. Gibbings, in *Coconut Island*, has drawn on all the lore of the South Seas to make a boys' adventure story in the tradition of Stevenson and Ballantyne. But it is a practical book—how to look after yourself if wrecked on a South Sea island,—how to make a hut, to trap fish, to climb a coconut tree—enough information to furnish any dream of South Sea adventure. And for those parents and uncles who believe in *educational* books for young people, let me add that the realistic background of native life and customs, and the author's own woodcuts, beautiful as ever, make *Coconut Island* instructive as well as enjoyable.

The fairy-tale is the only kind of story in which the reader's wishes are always fulfilled. Justice triumphs, evil is punished, diligence is rewarded—author and reader fashion the plot together, for each knows what the other wants—indeed they both want the same thing. It is a convention, no doubt—but the writer can add his own personal magic to that of the *leprechaun* or Fairy Queen.

Miss Lynch peoples her tales with the simple peasant folk of Munster and in so doing depicts a traditional life that is fast departing. Her magic is a gentleness and charm that touches off that strange indefinable pathos at the heart of every true fairy-tale.

B.M.

#### BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

BRINSLEY MacNAMARA: Born near Delvin, Co. Westmeath. Author of seven novels, two books of short-stories, and nine full-length plays for the Abbey Theatre. The best known of the former are "The Valley of the Squinting Windows", "The Mirror in the Dusk", and "The Various Lives of Marcus Igoo". Among his plays are "Margaret Gillan", "The Grand House in the City", and "Look at the Heffernafs".

ERIC CROSS: Born in 1904 of Irish parentage. Is a research chemist engaged in the early work on organo-therapy. Has done technical writing in that field. Became widely-known on the publication of his book, "The Tailor and Ansty".

STANISLAUS JOYCE: Has been Professor of Commercial English in the University of Trieste since 1922 and has also taught in the University of Florence. Is brother of James Joyce.

MICHAEL CAMPBELL: Born Dublin, 1924. Is a graduate of Dublin University and a barrister-at-law.

L. A. G. STRONG: Born Plymouth, 1896, of predominantly Irish parentage. Spent regular intervals of his youth near Dublin. Has written many books, including novels, short stories, and verse.

REARDEN CONNER: Born Dublin, 1907. Had his first novel published in 1933 and has since published nine more. Lives in London.

BRYAN MacMAHON: Born Listowel, Co. Kerry, 1909. Has won a wide reputation as one of Ireland's leading short-story writers. His first collection "The Lion-Tamer and other Stories" was published last year.

BLANAID SALKELD: Born in Chittagong, India (now Pakistan) of Irish parents. Has published three volumes of poetry.

ROBERT GREACEN: Born Londonderry, 1920. Has contributed poetry and criticism to many Irish and British periodicals and has edited many anthologies. Now lives in London.

BENEDICT KIELY: Born 1919, Dromore, Co. Tyrone. A graduate of U.C.D. Is a journalist by profession and has published two novels, a study of Carleton, and a book about Irish Partition.